

## **Week Seven Legislative Report**

**February 18th - February 24th 2001**

**1st Regular Session of the Twenty-Second Alaska Legislature**

### **Introduction:**

#### **Senator Murkowski Speaks at a Joint Session**

The big event of the week was a joint session of the legislature to hear from U. S. Senator Frank Murkowski. Senator Murkowski told the Legislature that Alaska will continue to play a critical role in meeting national energy needs. "After suffering rolling blackouts in California, heating oil spikes in the Northeast, and skyrocketing natural gas prices everywhere else, Americans are starting to get the message that they just might need Alaska's energy resources," Murkowski said.

Murkowski praised the Alaska Legislature's efforts to appropriate \$1.5 million to lobby for oil exploration and development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's coastal plain; voiced encouragement of a variety of methods of delivering North Slope natural gas to local, domestic and international markets; and looked forward to reauthorization of the trans-Alaska Pipeline right of way by 2004.

He also commented on federal involvement in Alaska issues, including Medicare funding; Alaska-Canada rail links; Southeast Alaska power generation and transmission; logging and forestry management; transportation; fisheries management; and education.

### **Budget:**

#### **Knowles Back Education Funding Task Force Report with an addition \$45 Million for Education in FY 02**

Governor Knowles this week announced his intent to increase funding for education by nearly \$45 million in the upcoming budget year.

Knowles said he has accepted all the recommendations of an Education Funding Task Force he appointed in December and will submit necessary budget amendments and bills to the Legislature beginning this week.

As a result of the report Knowles said he will introduce three bills that total \$36.6 million and will:

- \* Boost education formula funding by \$34.6 million \$24.6 million to increase the base student allocation in the funding formula from \$3,940 to \$4,055 per student, and \$10 million to increase Quality Schools grants from \$16 to \$65 per student.
- \* Allocate \$800,000 to a teacher loan assumption program that will help recruit new Alaska teachers by paying off their student loans no matter where they went to school at a rate of \$2,000 per year up to a total of \$10,000. The proposal will help attract and keep top-notch teachers.
- \* Keep school funding fair by suspending a provision in the old SB 36 that pays only 60 cents on the dollar for new enrollment growth in some rural school districts while urban districts get full payment for more students. The Department of Education and Early Development estimates it will cost \$1.2 million next year to make sure enrollment growth is funded at 100 percent for all school districts. The task force recommends suspending the 60 percent provision while a complete study of district education costs is under way.

Knowles said he also will introduce budget amendments totaling approximately \$8 million:

- \* \$7 million to support the task force recommendations for direct assistance to low-performing schools, incentives for excellent schools and a Center for School Excellence to coordinate and deliver assistance to students and schools not making the grade.
- \* Approximately \$1 million to back task force recommendations to fund the district cost factor study and data collection and analysis necessary to determine which schools need the most help.

The budget amendments can be covered within the governor's original school foundation budget for FY 02 because he kept the foundation formula for next year at current levels even though the state's share of school aid will drop due to increases in local and federal aid.

## **Knowles, AFN Call for Increased Suicide Prevention Efforts**

Governor Knowles on Friday announced the development of a suicide prevention action plan for Alaska in partnership with local communities and Native organizations.

The Governor called for a collaborative statewide effort to support community programs aimed at suicide prevention and to support these statewide efforts, the Governor included \$325,000 in the fiscal year 2002 budget.

In collaboration with the Alaska Mental Health Trust, Knowles and the Alaska Federation of Natives are calling for the formation of a Suicide Prevention Council, to shoulder the responsibility for developing a suicide prevention action plan for Alaska. They also want to designate a Statewide Suicide Prevention Coordinator, who will provide a statewide focus for suicide prevention efforts.

Rural communities that want to get involved in suicide prevention have asked for the State's assistance. To respond to their requests, community-based suicide prevention funds will be used to support suicide prevention summits, conferences, healing workshops, and training that helps people learn what they can do to help prevent suicide.

Noting that the urgency of the situation in Interior Alaska, the Governor also requested \$600,000 to replace the mental health center in Galena. Galena's mental health clinic is currently located in an old trailer. The City of Galena requested the funds to replace the trailer with an addition to its existing health center to provide adequate mental health care to the community.

## **Bills on the Move:**

### **HB 16 Which Makes it Easier to Set Up New Cities Passes House**

The House this week passed a bill making it easier for Alaskans to form new local governments, by allowing them to pick and chose what level of services they wanted to provide.

**HB 16** allows the former category of second-class cities to write their own charter or city constitution, and form the kind of local government that they want to form.

**HB 16** creates a local government option called the "Home Rule Community" similar to the second-class city, but based on a charter designed to meet that community's unique needs and desires. **HB 16** will also allow second-class cities to reclassify themselves as home rule communities.

While Alaska has at least as many unorganized communities as organized cities, many have chosen not to organize because they prefer not to take on all the responsibilities of being second-class cities, including operating a school district, meeting strict financial auditing standards, and providing land-use, zoning and platting services.

While they could not operate school districts, Home Rule Communities could choose to provide services including parks and recreation, sewer and water, road maintenance, trash collection, ports and harbors, police and fire protection, health clinics, animal control, or planning and zoning. Home Rule Communities would need voter approval to collect and spend any local taxes.

**HB 16** would not take effect until after passage of a conforming bill to amend state law to ensure Home Rule Communities were not subject to any unintended mandates. The bill moves next to the Senate.

## **HB 4 Amended to Bring Down Departments Fiscal Notes**

Representative Rokeberg, sponsor of **HB 4** one of the most comprehensive drunken driving bills working its way through the Legislature, introduced a new version this week aimed at making the tougher alcohol law more affordable for government. Although the state is still figuring out the total price, Representative Rokeberg is hoping the new bill will cost a fraction of the first version, projected to top \$100 million a year.

One of the key amendments was to a section of the original bill that would have made a third drunken driving conviction an automatic felony. The change was made after the state Department of Correction said it would generate 800 new felons and cost about \$90 million to keep them in state prisons.

Under the amended bill, a person convicted of drunken driving a third time would be guilty of a felony only if the third offense happened within 10 years of the first two.

Current law makes a third DWI charge a felony if it occurs within five years of the first offense. The 10-year felony provision would be phased in over time to reduce the number of felons immediately entering the prison system.

The amended bill also toned down the minimum jail time for repeat offenders. The amended version would require a minimum 240 days in jail for a third conviction, 480 days for a fourth and two years for subsequent offenses.

The new version kept intact other major provisions, including one to lower the legal blood-alcohol level for drivers from 0.10 to 0.08.

## **New Governor's Bills:**

### **Governor Introduces SB 116 Welfare Reform Law Changes**

Five years after reforming the welfare system to support self-sufficiency and remove institutional disincentives to work, Governor Knowles introduced new legislation this week that would further improve administration of the program.

The Alaska Temporary Assistance Program, or ATAP, currently provides up to five years

of assistance for Alaska's poorest families. An exemption from the five-year limit is provided for those meeting certain criteria. But the law caps the number of families that can continue receiving assistance after 60 months at 20 percent of the current caseload.

As the caseload continues to decline, the number of available exemptions also shrinks. But the number of families who will need continued support after receiving 60 months of assistance does not shrink proportionally. These families have significant challenges to employment, such as family violence, learning disabilities, mental and physical health problems, and problems with substance abuse.

The bill proposes two other changes to current ATAP statutes. The first change affects the seasonal reduction that cuts benefits in half during July, August, and September, for two-parent families where both parents are physically and mentally able to work. A recent superior court ruling invalidated state regulations concerning the seasonal reduction in assistance. The court's ruling would require the Department of Health and Social Services to determine the family's primary wage earner and his or her employment status before applying the seasonal reduction.

The bill adjusts the statute to support regulations that apply the seasonal reduction in aid to all able-bodied two-parent families, regardless of their employment status.

The bill also repeals a provision that exempts an incapacitated parent from developing a family self-sufficiency plan.

## **New House Bills:**

**HB 124 (Rep. Halcro)** Nursing Home/Assisted Living Employees/Visitor

**HB 125 (Rep. Knott)** Unlawful Viewing

**HB 113 (Rep.Green)** Health Care Insurance Payment

**HB 136 (Rep. Meyer)** Municipal Regulation of Smoking

## **New Senate Bills:**

**Halford Introduces SB 99 & SB 105 Bills that will Enforce Victims' Rights, Expand DNA Registry**

Senator Halford introduced two bills on this week that will increase the chance of

finding violent criminals through DNA registries, and ensure that victims of crime are informed and able to assert the rights guaranteed to them in Alaska's Constitution.

**SB 99** would expand the state's convicted offender DNA registry to include samples from those convicted of burglary.

**SB 105** would create an Office of Victims' Rights and a Victims' Advocate, designed to help guide crime victims through the legal process in the aftermath of a violent crime.

## **Interesting Notes:**

### **Don't Forget Alaska Women Lobby Auction February 27th**

Fat Tuesday Fabulous Feminist Festivities !!! The Women's Lobby Auction, 5 pm Feb 27 at the Filipino Hall, will be a Mardi Gras party this year with great auction items, catered and homemade cajun food, party favors and more. Bring your friends and have a fun time supporting our lobbyist for women's and children's issues in the legislature.

### **Nancy Nolan Named to District Court**

Governor Knowles this week appointed Nancy Nolan to the district court bench in Anchorage. Currently a Magistrate with the court system in Anchorage, Nolan previously worked in private legal practice, as an Assistant Attorney General for the state, and for the public defender agency.

Nolan, 43, was born in New York City, graduated from the University of Colorado in 1980, and earned her law degree from the University of California at Davis in 1984. She worked as a law clerk for the public defender agency and Alaska Supreme Court justice Brian Shortell before accepting a job with the Alaska Public Defender Agency in 1985.

In 1989, Nolan was hired as an Assistant Attorney General where she specialized in oil spill litigation, and worked on natural resource issues, torts, and civil rights cases. In 1996, she served as an acting district court judge for several months, after which she joined the law firm of Rice, Volland & Taylor. Since late 1999, Nolan has worked for the Alaska Court System as a committing magistrate where she presided over traffic cases and other minor offenses, set bail, and issued warrants and restraining orders.

Nolan fills a vacancy on the Anchorage bench left when Judge Stephanie Joannides was appointed to the Superior Court last year. As a District Court Judge, Nolan will earn approximately \$88,000 annually.

### **Knowles Appoints Rebecca Nance Gamez deputy Commissioner of Labor**

Governor Knowles has tapped Employment Security Division Director Rebecca Nance Gamez to be the new deputy commissioner for the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Gamez, 40, was appointed director of the Employment Security Division (ESD) in January 1995. Prior to her appointment, she worked for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Alaska and Oregon State Legislatures, and as business manager for a restaurant corporation in Washington, D.C.

Gamez graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies. She will assume her new responsibilities immediately and earn approximately \$86,000 annually.

### **Global Warming and Alaska's Future**

A state expert on global climatology will share his views on climatic change and how Alaska might fare under global warming, at a House Resources Committee meeting on Monday, Feb. 26.

Gunter Weller, Ph.D., professor of Geophysics Emeritus and director of the Center for Global Change Research at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, will make his presentation before the committee at 1 p.m. in the House Resources Committee Room, Room 124 of the Capitol.

### **Community Service Award Honors Senator Johnny Ellis**

The first Community Service Award from the Alaska State Community Service Commission (ASCSC) was presented to Senator Johnny Ellis at a luncheon ceremony on Wednesday.

The award was christened the "Johnny Ellis Community Service Award" and was given to Ellis this year and will be given annually in the future to recognize Alaskans who have shown exemplary leadership in the area of community service.

### **Davis Keynote Speaker for Black History Month:**

Senator Bettye Davis was the keynote speaker at the annual Red, Black & Green Banquet held Saturday at The Susitna Club on Elemendorf Air Force Base. The banquet is part of the Elmendorf's celebration of Black Heritage Month. This year's theme is: "Family, Church, Politics and Culture."

## Action Needed: No Action Needed This Week

# Committee Meetings

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### (S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 24 Saturday 10:30 AM BUTROVICH 205

+ -- Time Change -- TELECONFERENCED

HS Graduation Qualifying Exam Hearing:

Testimony from School Administrators,

Teachers and Special Education Directors

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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### (S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 26 Monday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532

=+SB 72 TAKE A CHILD HUNTING SEASON TELECONFERENCED

=SB 65 PAY EQUITY FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

=SB 64 HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA FOR CERTAIN WWII VETS

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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### (H)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 26 Monday 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120

\*+HB 40 REVOKE DRIVER'S LIC. FOR FATAL ACCIDENT

TELECONFERENCED

=+HB 27 LICENSE HOME INSPECTORS TELECONFERENCED

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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### (S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 26 Monday 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

+ Quality Schools/Quality Students Update: TELECONFERENCED

Association of Alaska School Boards

+ Senate Bill: TELECONFERENCED

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION QUALIFYING EXAM

<Pending Introduction and Referral>

Testimony from School Boards Only

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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### (S)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 26 Monday 1:30 PM BELTZ 211

\*+SB 97 PROBATION AND PAROLE FEES TELECONFERENCED

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(H)LABOR & COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 26 Monday 3:15 PM CAPITOL 17

\*+HB 113 HEALTH CARE INSURANCE PAYMENTS TELECONFERENCED

TELECONFERENCED

=+HB 81 EXTENDING BOARD OF DENTAL EXAMINERS TELECONFERENCED

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(H)LAW FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*

Feb 26 Monday 3:30 PM FAHRENKAMP 203

Dept of Law Budget

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(H)COMMUNITY & REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 8:00 AM CAPITOL 124

\*+HB 136 MUNICIPAL REGULATION OF SMOKING TELECONFERENCED

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(H)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 8:00 AM CAPITOL 102

\*HCR 4 AFRICAN-AMERICAN CITIZEN RECOGNIT'N MONTH

\*HJR 16 OPPOSE CANADIAN FEE TO TRANSPORT FIREARMS

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(H)PUBLIC SAFETY FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 8:30 AM CAPITOL 120

Budget Closeout

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(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532

=HB 117 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS: FAST TRACK

=SB 73 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS/AMEND APPROP.

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(H)ADMINISTRATION FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 10:00 AM CAPITOL 17

Budget Closeout

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(H)LAW FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 10:30 AM HOUSE FINANCE 519  
Dept of Law Budget

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(H)TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 1:00 PM CAPITOL 17

=+HB 39 VEHICLE REGISTRATION/DWI/FORFEITURE TELECONFERENCED

=+HB 4 DRUNK DRIVING CLEARINGHOUSE TELECONFERENCED

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(H)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

\*+HB 114 INHALANT ABUSE TELECONFERENCED

\*+HCR 6 INHALANTS AND POISONS AWARENESS WEEK  
TELECONFERENCED

+SB 21 FINES BY THE STATE MEDICAL BOARD TELECONFERENCED

+ Overview: AK Association of School Boards TELECONFERENCED

<Teleconference listen only on overview>

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(H)SP CMTE ON MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS SPECIAL COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 3:30 PM CAPITOL 120

\*+HB 137 RECORDS OF VETERANS TELECONFERENCED

\*+HB 87 ALASKA VETERANS ADVISORY COUNCIL TELECONFERENCED

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(S)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 27 Tuesday 3:30 PM BELTZ 211

\*SJR 14 OPPOSE CANADIAN FEE TO TRANSPORT FIREARMS

\*SB 102 SOCIAL SECURITY # & DRIVER'S LICENSES

=SB 103 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND LEGISLATIVE ETHICS

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(H)SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION SPECIAL COMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

\*+HB 99 SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND SAFETY TELECONFERENCED

=HB 94 PUPIL COMPETENCY TEST;ANNUAL EDUC. REPORT

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(H)CORRECTIONS FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 8:30 AM HOUSE FINANCE 519

Budget Closeout

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(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532

=HB 117 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS: FAST TRACK

=SB 73 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS/AMEND APPROP.

SB 58 ADD PHYSICIAN ASST TO STATE MEDICAL BOARD

SB 93 ARCTIC WINTER GAMES TEAM ALASKA TRUST

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(H)JOINT SESSION OTHER COMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 11:00 AM HOUSE CHAMBER

State of the Judiciary Message

The Honorable Dana Fabe, Chief Justice

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(H)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120

=+HB 4 DRUNK DRIVING CLEARINGHOUSE TELECONFERENCED

<Pending Referral>

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

+ Fish Safety Monitoring: TELECONFERENCED

Dept of Health & Social Services

Dept of Environmental Conservation

\*+SB 96 C.O.P.S FOR API DEMOLITION/CONSTRUCTION TELECONFERENCED

\*+SB 112 LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN;MENTAL HLTH AUTH

TELECONFERENCED

+ Senate Bill: TELECONFERENCED

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION QUALIFYING EXAM

<Pending Introduction and Referral>

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

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(S)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 1:30 PM BELTZ 211

\*+SB 99 DNA REGISTRATION OF BURGLARS TELECONFERENCED

\*+SB 105 VICTIMS' RIGHTS/ PRISONER'S PFD TELECONFERENCED

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(H)HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*

Feb 28 Wednesday 4:00 PM CAPITOL 124  
Budget Closeout

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