

2019 CAPITOL CURRENTS

31st Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

Thirteenth Edition – 4/8 to 4/14/19

Overtime 30 days 'til 120

~ House budget done ~ Governor not satisfied ~ Senate's turn ~

HIGHLIGHTS

The Department of Health and Social Services announced suspension of May and June payments from the Senior Benefits Program for 4,700 Alaskans - due to insufficient funding. They say the shortfall is partly related to reducing the application backlog; need surpassing earlier projections.

HHSS met on Saturday to hold a confirmation hearing for commissioner designee Crum. The Senior Benefits Program was one of the hot topics he faced. Shortly thereafter, the Governor released a statement calling the House Majority “disingenuous” in their concern.

See the confirmation hearing here: [Commissioner Designee Crum](#)

Read the Press Release here: [Governor's Press Releases](#)

In 2008, the Alaska legislature passed [HB 200](#) establishing a presumption of coverage for disability from diseases for municipal firefighters. On Wednesday, Senator Gray-Jackson introduced [SB 107](#) to expand Alaska's presumptive illness law to include peace officers, paramedics, state firefighters, and medical technicians.

Alaska statute allows a presumptive claim for compensation for work-induced disabilities including respiratory disease, cardiovascular events, or certain types of cancer. **SB107** adds breast cancer to the list of covered claims.

The companion bill [HB 84](#) sponsored by Rep. Josephson received a hearing in HHSS last week.

API finally received national reaccreditation for psychiatric care from the Joint Commission, according to the Department of Health and Social Services. WellPath is the current operator and sees reaccreditation as a “huge” achievement.

The University Board of Regents agreed with President Jim Johnson and, by a small margin, voted not to seek accreditation for some licensure programs at UAA's Education School. This will impact 335 of 489 students.

Crime bills continue to slog through the process. Crime is a top priority of the Senate and President Giessel expects to see the Governor's crime bill package advance. The House will focus on it this week in Judiciary with a less certain prognosis.

Former Governor Walker's Chief of Staff, Scott Kendall, expressed significant concerns about Amanda Price - the Governor's nominee for Public Safety Commissioner - during public confirmation hearings in HSTA.

Others disagreed.

US Attorney General William Barr is coming to Alaska. He stated that “Alaska Native women face unacceptably high rates of violence in very remote areas” and wants to learn more about it firsthand.

He’ll focus on tribal courts and pledged to work with Senator Murkowski on a solution. Congressional reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has brought attention to the issue.

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

The governor’s office will post press releases and other items of interest here:
<https://gov.alaska.gov/>

The Governor accepted the resignation of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights and announced his selections to fill their vacancies effective immediately: Cynthia Erickson of Tanana whose term began April 10, 2019 and expires on March 1, 2021 and Debbie Fullenwider of Anchorage who will serve a term beginning April 10, 2019 – March 1, 2023.

Read more about the new commissioners here: [Press release](#)

BUDGET ISSUES

The House voted 24-14 to approve a \$10.29 billion for FY 20 operations that cuts about \$257 million from the FY19 budget. Governor Dunleavy was looking for \$1.6 billion reduction and calls it an “incomplete fix”.

Dividends will be handled separately.

The final House bill includes more money for prosecutors and public defenders and restores half the funding that reimburses local school districts for a portion of bond debt for facility construction and renovation.

Minority proposed cuts to ferries, pre-K programs, public health nursing, Alaska Legal Services, public radio, the Human Rights Commission, the University, commercial fisheries and Medicaid were all rejected. The ban on Medicaid funding for elective abortions, added in HFIN, stayed in.

Meanwhile, the Governor says “no deal” on the budget without legislative progress on his constitutional budget amendments. His amendments would require public votes on changes to taxes or PFD’s. He also wants more action on crime.

Dunleavy told reporters he could pressure the legislature into considering the constitutional amendments by calling them into special session. In response, Rep. Tuck offered an amendment during Floor debate on the operating budget to increase the legislature’s budget for legislative expenses by \$1 million and legislative budget/audit expenses by \$1.6 million. The amendment passed.

The Senate Finance Committee is on top of it as they wait for the House bill. They held statewide public budget hearings and are finishing up subcommittee work. Most testifiers have one or more problems with the Governor’s budget.

The Senate version coming soon.

Senate Finance also started to rewrite the traditional formula used to pay the PFD. [SB 103](#) was heard for the first time last Wednesday. Co-Chair Stedman said the proposal comes from last year's decision to create an annual transfer from the Permanent Fund to the state treasury.

Under last year's [SB 26](#), 5.25% of the average five-year value of the fund is to be transferred to the treasury each year. (The draw will drop to 5% in 2021) They are opening with a 50/50 split of the 5% between the dividend and government services.

Nearly a million bucks was raised in a state-sponsored raffle designed to benefit K-12 schools. The program was set up by the Legislature last year allowing Alaskans to donate a portion of their permanent fund dividends to the raffle.

Bill Hearings:

[HB 38](#) the Capital budget receives its second and third hearing in **HFIN on Tuesday at 9am and Wednesday at 1:30pm**. David Teal will review capital projects during the Tuesday meeting and the committee will receive a deferred maintenance update on Wednesday.

[HB 96](#) Pioneers' Homes and Veterans' Home Rates sponsored by Rep. Fields was heard in HSS last week and is scheduled for another **this week on Thursday at 3:00pm**.

Invited and Public testimony will be taken.

[HB 106](#) School Bond Debt Reimbursement sponsored by Rep. Wilson passed from HFIN and is on the Floor calendar **on Monday**.

[SB 92](#) PFD Contributions to the General Fund sponsored by Senator Wilson passed from SSTA. It is scheduled for a hearing in **SFIN on Monday at 9:00am**.

Budget Hearings:

Tuesday: 1:30pm HFIN Spring Revenue Forecast by Department of Revenue

BILLS ON THE MOVE

Hearings:

[HB 29](#) Insurance Coverage for Telehealth sponsored by Rep. Spohnholz and [HB 97](#) Telehealth; Physician Assistants; Drugs sponsored by Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins (companion to SB 44) will be heard in **HL&C Monday at 3:15pm**.

[SB 6](#) Pre-Elementary Programs/Funding sponsored by Senator Begich receives its second hearing in **SEDC Tuesday at 9am**. *Public testimony will be taken.*

[HB 93](#) Military Spouse Courtesy License sponsored by Rep. Tuck will be heard in HMVA at **1pm on Tuesday**

HHSS will hear [HB 89](#) Opioid Prescription Information and [HB 114](#) SHARP 3 both sponsored by Rep. Spohnholz on **Tuesday at 3pm**.

[SB 36](#) Extend the Board of Nursing sponsored by Senator Giessel is scheduled for its first hearing in **HL&C on Wednesday at 3:15pm**.

[SB 37](#) Renewal of Vaccine Assessment Program sponsored by Senator Giessel will be heard in **HHSS on Thursday at 3pm**. *Invited and Public testimony will be taken.*

[HB 115](#) Absentee Voting sponsored by Rep. Tuck will be heard in **HSTA on Thursday at 3pm**. *Public testimony will be taken.*

Crime Bills:

[HB 14](#) Assault; Sex Offenses; Sentencing Aggravator sponsored by Rep. Lincoln is up on **Monday at 1:00pm in HJUD**.

[SB 32](#) Crimes; Sentencing; Mental Illness; Evidence sponsored by the Governor is set for another hearing in **SSTA on Monday at 6pm**. *Public testimony must call in by 7pm* and will be heard again on **Tuesday at 3:30pm and Thursday at 1:30pm**.

HSTA will hear [HB 50](#) Arrest; Release; Sentencing; Probation and [HB 51](#) Probation; Parole; Sentences; Credits sponsored by the Governor on **Tuesday at 3pm**.

[SSHB 20](#) Sexual Assault Examination Kits sponsored by Rep. Tarr will be in **HSTA Thursday at 3pm**. *Public testimony will be taken.*

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Monday at 8am, HEDC will hear a presentation Why Education is so Costly in Alaska by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER).

Tuesday at Noon the first meeting of the Children’s Caucus will be held - priorities will be discussed and lunch will be provided.

Wednesday at 11:30am the Senate and House will meet in Joint Session to consider the Governor’s Appointees.

Thursday at 8am HCRA will hear a presentation on the Status of Industrial Hemp Industry in Alaska.

Thursday at 9am HFIN will hear an update from Quinlan Steiner on Criminal Justice Reform.

Confirmation hearings:

Monday	1:00pm	HJUD State Commission for Human Rights Commission on Judicial Conduct
	3:15pm	HL&C Board of Nursing and Board of Social Work Examiners
Tuesday	3:00pm	HHSS Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees Health and Social Services Commissioner Designee Adam Crum
	3:00pm	HSTA Lt. Governor Successor; Chief Administrative Law Judge; State Commission for Human Rights; State Board of Parole;

Personnel Board; Alaska Public Offices Commission; Alaska Police Standards Council

3:30pm SSTA Alaska Human Rights Commission

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Website-Daily Committee Hearings for April 15-19, 2019

[Daily Calendar](#)

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](#)

Streaming Video: [alaskalegislaturetv](#)

Testifying:

Legislative Information Office (LIO) [LIO Offices](#)

In Juneau: see committee hearing list for room numbers

Call-in: available with prior approval from the committee chair
1-855-463-5009 or in Juneau 907-463-5009

~ End of Report ~

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