

# 2020 CAPITOL CURRENTS

31<sup>st</sup> Alaska State Legislature ~ 2<sup>nd</sup> Session

Fourth Edition  
2/16/2020

~ House Finance set to hear public comments on their version of the FY2021 Budget ~

## HIGHLIGHTS

Plain speaking Supreme Court Chief Justice Bolger sternly reaffirmed the Judicial Branch's independence in his annual speech to the Legislature. He also said they are strong but need more money for Therapeutic Courts, faster case action, and 1% salary bump for non-judicial employees.

He pointed out that big budget cuts are hard to sustain without similar reduction in crime, divorce rate and other issues of justice.

Rep. Kopp is leading a bi-partisan charge for official state recognition of the 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska. De facto tribal status is often acknowledged in day-to-day state business.

But, lawmakers have been reluctant to make it official. [HB 221](#) State Recognition of Tribes would change that. *Public testimony* will be taken on the bill **Tuesday morning at 8am in House Tribal Affairs**.

Senator Shower and other disgruntled legislators want legislation and a constitutional amendment to prohibit binding legislative caucuses. They say the rule undermines minority members and can force them to vote against conscience or the will of constituents, giving too much power to the few.

The dividend fights last year, and related punishments are the primary cause. On the other hand, majority member Senator Stevens argued that the Legislature would never get anything done. Senator Revak said he loved his colleagues, but their proposal is just plain wrong.

Administration Commissioner Tshibaka is attempting to relocate the Violent Crimes Compensation Board from Juneau to Anchorage. The Executive Director since 2009, Kate Hudson, has resigned as has another staff member and a Board member declined reappointment over the relocation effort.

The Alaska Supreme Court hasn't ruled on the legality of the Recall campaign but on Friday authorized supporters to begin gathering signatures. Twenty-five percent of the previous general election, **71,252 signatures**, is needed.

In a separate filing, the court agreed to hear an appeal to block the recall on a sped-up schedule. The state and Stand Tall with Mike must file their briefs by Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>. Recall Dunleavy must reply by March 9<sup>th</sup>, and oral arguments will be held on March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Senate leaders are worried about the REAL ID deadline for airplane bound rural Alaska. Getting an ID is complicated in communities without DMV offices and where elders don't speak English. Commissioner Tshibaka says there are other options and they will educate with vigor.

## **BUDGET ISSUES**

The Administration complied with a Superior Court order and released \$30 million in contested school funding. It will continue to defend against a lawsuit, now in the Supreme Court, asserting the Legislature's ability to set budgets for more than one year forward.

The Governor has proposed a revenue measure - a state lottery that may allow sports betting. Rep. Thompson proposed a version limited to draw style lotteries. Neither will fill the \$1.5 billion gap but could help. Anti-gambling and industry politics may bog it down.

[SB 180](#) would make state finances more transparent by establishing an online checkbook. Sponsor Senator Wielechowski says it will lead to greater government accountability and a public better able to assist in making difficult government decisions.

House Finance Subcommittees closed out their work on the operating budget. The full Finance Committee will talk about it this week. Public comment starts Wednesday night continuing through Saturday afternoon (see schedule below).

When public testimony concludes, Finance members will be able to propose amendments to the bill in front of them and then vote on the budget they'll send to the House floor.

### **Budget Hearings for the week of February 17<sup>th</sup>**

Let's start with **House Finance and the Public Comment Hearing Opportunities**

**Monday at 1:30pm, Tuesday at 9am and Wednesday at 1:30pm HFIN** will accept Subcommittee Closeout Reports and bring the operating and mental health budgets before them in preparation for public comment.

**Wednesday at 5:00 PM, Thursday at 1:30pm, Friday at 1:30pm and Saturday at Noon** both operating and mental health budgets are scheduled in **HFIN for public comment**

#### **Prep for Public Comment**

If possible, travel to your Legislative Information Office to provide testimony.

Click [HERE](#) for the address of your community's Legislative Information Office (LIO).

Be sure to arrive at the LIO at least 15 minutes early to sign-in but no later than 30 minutes prior to the end of the scheduled testimony time to ensure you can provide your comments.

If you need to call, dial 1-855-463-5009 or in Juneau 907-463-5009. You must hang up immediately after testifying to help open the phone lines.

*If you are with a group with the same message, select a spokesperson for the group.*

**Time limit for public testimony is 2 MINUTES.**

You can also send written testimony to [housefinance@akleg.gov](mailto:housefinance@akleg.gov) by 5:00 pm on Saturday 2/22/20.

<b>Public Comment Wednesday (2/19)</b>	
5:00-6:00 PM	Juneau (testimony will be taken in House Finance Room 519)
6:45-8:00 PM	Sitka, Petersburg, Delta Junction, Unalaska, Dillingham, Glennallen, Tok
5:00-8:00 PM	*offnet – communities not otherwise scheduled
<b>Public Comment Thursday (2/20)</b>	
5:00-6:30 PM	Fairbanks
6:45-8:00 PM	Homer, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su, Seward
5:00-8:00 PM	*offnet – communities not otherwise scheduled
<b>Public Comment Friday (2/21)</b>	
5:00-6:45 PM	Anchorage
7:00-8:00 PM	Bethel, Cordova, Kotzebue, Nome, Valdez, Wrangell, Utqiagvik
5:00-8:00 PM	*offnet – communities not otherwise scheduled
<b>Public Comment Saturday (2/22)</b>	
12:00-3:00 PM	Offnet/LIOs

**Okay, now for the other Budget Hearings**

**SDOC FINSUB** meets at **7:45am on Monday** for the department of corrections overview.

**SDPS FINSUB** meets at **3:30pm on Monday and Wednesday** to discuss the Alaska State Troopers.

**Tuesday** both **SFIN (9am)** and **HFIN (1:30pm)** will hear about the Medicaid Enrollment and Spending (MESA) Long-term Forecast.

**Wednesday, HEDC** meets at **8am** will hear both invited and *public testimony* on [HB 155](#) Alaska Performance Scholarship; Eligibility.

**Thursday at 7:45am, SHSS FINSUB** will hear the overview for the department.

**Friday at 7:45am, SHSS FINSUB** will discuss Alaska’s Medicaid Program.

Also on **Friday, SFIN** meets at **9am** to discuss [SB 104](#) Appropriation Limit imposes structural controls to limit how much spending can increase year to year. Introduced by SFIN last April, it’s the bill’s second hearing this session.

**BILLS**

[HJR 15](#) is moving right along and passed out of HJUD. It would amend the constitution and reduce from 45 (3/4) to 40 (2/3) the number of votes needed in joint session to override revenue and appropriation bills.

Sponsors say this will bring us in line with all other U.S. states and territories.

## **Hearing for the week of the 17<sup>th</sup>:**

**HEDC** meets at **8am on Monday** to hear *public testimony* on [HB 181](#) Public Schools; Mental Health Education.

**SL&C** meets on **Tuesday at 1:30pm** to take *public testimony* on [SB 172](#) Extending the State Medical Board that will extend the Board through June 30, 2025.

[SB 52](#) Alcoholic Beverage Control; Alcohol Reg is scheduled for **Wednesday 9am in SFIN** *Public Testimony will be taken.*

**HL&C** meets at **3:15pm on Wednesday** to discuss [HB 91](#) Naturopaths; Licensing; Practice.

**Thursday at 3pm HSTA** will hold the first hearing on [HB 225](#) the Governor's Prostitution/Trafficking; Vacate Conviction bill.

Also on **Thursday at 3pm**, there will be a joint meeting of **H HSS and L&C** to hear [HB 229](#)- Health Information/Database/Public Corporation and a presentation on the Alaska Healthcare Transformation Project by Sandra Heffern & Christine Marasigan. **HL&C** will hear the bill again on **Friday at 3:15pm.**

**Friday at 1:30pm, SHSS** will hear [SB 134](#) Medicaid Coverage of License Counselors. Both invited and *public testimony will be taken.*

## **GOVERNOR'S CORNER**

The governor's office will post press releases and other items of interest here: [Press Releases](#)

## **ITEMS OF INTEREST**

**Monday at 9am HEDC** will meet jointly with **SEDC** to hear a presentation from the State Board of Education by James Fields, State Board Chair.

**Tuesday at 8am House Tribal Affairs** will hear a presentation on Alaska's Tribal Child Welfare Compact.

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski's annual address to the Legislature is on **Tuesday at 11am.**

Also on **Tuesday at 3pm HHSS** meets to hear a presentation on Improving Public Health with Comprehensive Sex Education with members of the Anchorage and Juneau Teen Councils and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's director.

**Wednesday's Lunch and Learn** will be on Partners for Progress Reentry Center - assisting people leaving prison readjust to community.

Meeting at **1:30pm on Wednesday, SHSS** will receive updates from HSS Commissioner Crum.

**Thursday at 8am, HSTA and Tribal Affairs** will meet jointly to discuss REAL ID Implementation.

**Thursday's Lunch and Learn** will be on Alaska's housing and homelessness services with presentations from Brian Wilson, Alaska Coalition on Housing & Homelessness; Jasmine Boyle, Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness; and Chris Kolerok and Katie Scovic, Cook Inlet Housing Authority.

The Annual meeting of the Anchorage Caucus will be on Saturday at 10am at the Loussac Library (3600 Denali Street in Anchorage).

Consideration of Governor's Appointees

**Tuesday at 1:30pm SL&C** considers Eleanor Vinson for the Board of Professional Counselors.

**~ End of Report ~**

**Contact: Caren Robinson ([carenr@gci.net](mailto:carenr@gci.net))**