

2020 CAPITOL CURRENTS

31st Alaska State Legislature ~ 2nd Session

Seventh Edition

~ COVID-19 is heavy on our minds.
The Permanent Fund just lost a bunch of money.
Undaunted, the Legislature plows on. ~

HIGHLIGHTS

Stay calm and keep informed, state officials told the legislature in a recent status report. Alaska Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink also mentioned common sense responses like washing your hands and staying home when you are sick.

Calling it a “phased and layered approach”, Dr. Zink says the state has been preparing for the virus under various scenarios. New Federal funding will help. The Governor said they also would ask the Legislature for money (see Governor’s Corner below). Cuts over the years add to the challenge.

Former Republican Senator and Finance Co-Chair Anna McKinnon is back. She just started work as Special Assistant to the Commissioner of Revenue. Anna will serve on the Alaska Energy Authority and AIDEA boards and do special projects as assigned. She left the Legislature in 2018.

Eastman is out for now. The Republican House minority couldn’t take it anymore and temporarily removed the unpopular representative from legislative committees for being disruptive and delaying action to get public attention. They call it a “pause” that is one step away from ejection.

About 80,000 folks in Alaska received food assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program as of January, according to the Alaska Food Coalition. New federal rules would tighten standards for states seeking waivers for work requirements.

Alaska recently acquired a waiver that would exempt 21 of our 29 boroughs from the rules. The coalition fears the proposed changes could further strain food banks.

The Initiative affecting the largest legacy oils fields is now good to go on the ballot. The Fair Share Act would raise the minimum tax and eliminates tax credits on Prudhoe Bay, Kuparuk and Alpine. Oil companies would have to report field revenues and costs. Vote timing depends on the legislative adjournment date.

University of Alaska President Jim Johnson says they’ll be ok. Big budget cut efforts will be hard and complicated, but UA will bounce back. If we had a mascot, it would be the Phoenix, he said. They are focusing on refining services and increasing revenues.

Wells Fargo and Swiss based UBS have joined Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase by saying no to Arctic oil and gas investments.

The Sierra Club and the Gwich’in Steering Committee have been working hard to get big investors out of the Arctic fossil fuel business.

BUDGET ISSUES

The Governor submitted a supplemental budget amendment to fund ten additional temporary positions within the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) for novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) preparedness and response.

The amendment would provide the Division of Public Health with five new public health nurses, three nurse epidemiologists, one microbiologist in Fairbanks to assist with lab testing, and one emergency manager to assist in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

These positions will be based statewide and will be able to travel as needed to rural communities to help monitor and screen for COVID-19.

The House passed a \$4.5 billion operating budget on the 43rd day of session, the earliest since 1993.

K-12 schools get less than last year, the Marine Highway and public safety get more and health care spending is level.

The PFD is not in the package and will be handled separately, where the real fun begins.

Bottom line: The overall budget is basically flat. Most of last year's cuts are being undone in the pending supplemental. The minority wasn't happy that PFD issues were postponed and opposed the bill.

They also withheld a critical vote to use money from the Constitutional Budget Reserve. Senate subcommittees are already working on it.

Here are some House budget highlights:

- Restores **\$128.3 million** for Medicaid, **\$7.5 million** for Adult Public Assistance, and **\$5 million** for Pioneer Homes.
- **\$10.6 million** investment in students with special needs.
- **Adds funds for public safety including**
 - **\$7.6 million** to address Alaska's growing prison population and for mental health and rehab services that will help inmates succeed when they get out of jail;
 - **\$6.3 million** to hire 36 Alaska State Trooper positions;
 - **\$1.7 million** to help increase the court system's productivity;
 - **\$1.6 million** for criminal prosecutors;
 - **\$1 million** so evidence is processed quickly;
 - **\$1 million** to invest in the Village Public Safety Officer program.
- Restores the Ocean Rangers Program that helps makes sure our waters and fisheries are protected from pollution.
- **\$180,000** to the Department of Environmental Conservation dairy program to strengthen Alaska's food security.
- **\$1 million** for Alaska Public Radio.

- Invests **\$11 million** to make sure people can access healthcare, food and supplies, and the outside world through the Marine Highway; also allows AMHS to receive **\$7.4 million** in ticket sales.

Conversation started. Rules co-chairs Rep. Kopp and Rep Johnston introduced [HB 306](#) that would dedicate 80% of a set withdrawal from the Permanent Fund earnings to government and 20% to dividends - around a \$900 dividend per year. Critics say too much for the bureaucrats. Front burner.

Budget Hearings for the week of March 9th

SDOC FINSUB meets **Monday at 7:45am** to discuss reentry and recidivism reduction; on **Thursday at 7:45am** to discuss the Alaska Psychiatric Institute; and on **Friday at 7:45am** to discuss Senior Health; Pioneer Homes, Senior & Disabilities Services.

Monday at 8am, HEDC will hear [HB 153](#) Pre-Elementary Programs/Funding and [HB 204](#) Pre-K/Elementary Ed Programs/Funding; Reading.

Both bills provide school districts the opportunity to provide early education to children age 4 if they so choose; and, establish new statewide reading program and intensive reading intervention services for readers starting in kindergarten through grade three.

9:00am on Monday, SFIN hears [HB 96](#) Pioneers’ Home and Veterans’ Home Rates.

1:30pm HFIN hears [HB 259](#) Supplemental PFD for 2019 Recipients which would payout another \$1,304 to each person that received a PFD in 2019.

Tuesday at 1:30pm HFIN begins a week long series of hearings for [HB 300](#) Permanent Fund. Appropriations from Earnings Reserve and [HB 306](#) PFD/GF Appropriations; Earnings Reserve. They are also scheduled to be heard on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday—same time, same channel.

Wednesday at 8am, HEDC will hear [HB 237](#) Appropriations: Early Literacy Programs and [HB 153](#) Pre-Elementary Programs/Funding which gets its second hearing of the week.

HB 237 appropriates \$10 million for FY21 and \$10, 225,500 for FY22 to be distributed as grants for early literacy programs to school districts.

Finally, HEDC meets Saturday at 1pm to take public testimony on [HB 153](#) Pre-Elementary Programs/Funding.

BILLS

Hearings for the week of March 9th:

SJR 13, Constitutional Amendment Prohibit Abortion/Funding is scheduled in **SJUD at 1:30pm on Monday, Wednesday** and *public testimony will be taken on Friday.*

Tuesday at 10am, HFIN will hear [HB 181](#) Public Schools; Mental Health Education.

HHSS meets **Tuesday at 3pm** to hear [HB 86](#) Mental Health Hospital: Contracts/Bids and [HB 183](#) Alaska Psychiatric Institute both will have an opportunity for *public testimony.*

Also meeting at **3pm**, **HSTA** will *take public testimony on* [HB 250](#) Voter Registration Age and will also hear [HB 228](#) Sex Offender Registry; Notice to Victims.

Wednesday at 9am, **HFIN** will hear [HB 182](#) Sexual Assault Examination Kits; Testing and **SFIN** will hear [SB 137](#) Extend Board of Parole and [SB 172](#) Extending State Medical Board.

[HB 290](#) Alternative to Arrest; Mental Health Center will be heard in **HJUD** at **1pm** on **Wednesday** and **Friday**.

SHSS meets at **1:30pm** to hear [SB 179](#) Nursing; Licensure; Multistate Compact and [SB 238](#) Involuntary Commitment; Protective Custody. *Public testimony will be taken on SB 238.*

Thursday at 8am, **H Tribal Affairs** meets to discuss [HJR 29](#) which commemorates the 75th anniversary of the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945.

HHSS meets at **3pm on Thursday** to discuss [HB 305](#) Mandatory Reporters to OCS; Judges.

HL&C will hear both [HB 91](#) Naturopaths; Licensing; Practice and [HB 27](#) Regulation of Flame Retardant Chemicals at **3:15pm on Friday**.

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

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

The Governor announced the next round of Town Hall meetings in Kenai, Seward, and Homer next week as part of his *Conversations with Alaskans* tour. Additional information can be [found here](#).

Meetings are open to the public.

- **Kenai, AK** – Monday, March 9, 2020
 - 6pm-8pm – Kenai Central High School
- **Seward, AK** – Tuesday, March 10, 2020
 - 5pm-7pm – AVTEC Gym
- **Homer, AK** – Wednesday, March 11, 2020
 - 5pm-7pm at Land's End Resort

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Leg Council meets on **Tuesday at 9am** to hold the Ranked-Choice Voting Initiative Hearing per AS. 24.05.186: A standing committee of the legislature, selected jointly by the presiding officers of the house of representatives and senate, shall hold at least one hearing on an initiative that the lieutenant governor has determined was properly filed.

Lunch and Learns

Tuesday at Noon, American Red Cross of Alaska—Sleeves Up, Hearts Open, All In!

Confirmation Hearings

Monday 1:30pm SHSS will consider David Boswell for the State Medical Board

SJUD will consider Deb Fancher, Lee Holmes for the Commission on Legislative Ethics and will consider William Craig, Elizabeth Engle, Kyle Foster and Evelyn Falzerano for the Commission for Human Rights.

Tuesday 1:30pm **SL&C** will consider Amanda Penwell for the Board of Direct-Entry Midwives; Bradley McConnell, Bernard Gatewood, and Christina Durham for the Board of Psychologists & Psychological Examiners; Lena Lafferty for the Board of Nursing.

Wednesday 1pm **HJUD** will consider Samantha Cherot for Public Defender and Todd Fletcher for the Commission on Judicial Conduct.

1:30pm **SJUD** will consider also Samantha Cherot for Public Defender; William Granger for the Board of Governors of the Alaska Bar; Daniel Wetherly for the Alaska Police Standards Council; and Jamie Allard for the State Commission for Human Rights.

Thursday 1:30pm **SL&C** will consider Catherine Hample for the Board of Nursing

3pm **HHSS** will consider Anita Halterman, Rhonda Boyles for the Mental health Trust Authority Board of Trustees; David Boswell, Richard Wein and Steve Parker for the State Medical Board.

Friday 1:30pm **SHSS** will consider Samuel Abbate, Christopher Gay, Steve Parker and Richard Wein for the State Medical Board.

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Website-Daily Committee Hearings for March 9-14, 2020

[Weekly 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 [Gavel](#)

Streaming Video - [Live Now](#)

Testifying

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

CALL-IN NUMBERS

- From Anchorage: 907-563-9085
- From Juneau: 907-586-9085
- From Anywhere Else: 844-586-9085

~ End of Report ~

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