

# 2020 CAPITOL CURRENTS

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

## Ninth Edition

3/21/2020

Breaking news breaks into breaking news.  
14 confirmed COVID-19 cases make it real.  
Oil drops to \$24 per barrel.  
Talk about a bad week.  
Breathe.

## HIGHLIGHTS

The Legislature probably wants to get out of here yesterday but will take care of business and stands with the Governor to resolve our whopping twin crises – public health and economic.

Current thinking is they will recess in a week or two after passing the budget and priority bills, including sunsets. They'd come back in the Fall after the dust settles a bit.

HSS Commissioner Crum says Alaska received a statewide waiver from work requirements for food stamp recipients. This attempt to help give food security to eligible Alaskans will last until the crisis passes.

The House just relaxed restrictions on unemployment aid for Alaskans that have been laid off or are getting reduced hours because of the pandemic. [HB 308](#)'s sponsor, Rep. Spohnholz said up to 70,000 workers could be out of jobs due to economic side effects.

HB 308 was referred to the Finance committee in the Senate. The Senate is generally on board with the bill.

After some political gyrations, the House passed [HCR 17](#), a limited version of the 24 hour rule. It is sitting in SRLS. COVID-19 bills will be fast tracked by allowing hearings to be announced for the next day instead of the usual, less flexible weekly schedule.

Other bills are still on the slower track until later.

[HB 309](#) Confirmation of Appointment was introduced Friday and referred to HRLS. The bill moved from RLS Friday night and is expected to be in the Senate over the weekend. HB 309 temporarily extends the time for which the Legislature can meet in joint session to confirm the Governor's cabinet appointments and appointments to state boards and commissions.

In the event of the need to adjourn early due to COVID-19 or if social distancing measures prevent the Legislature from meeting jointly, HB 309 would allow the Legislature the option of confirming governor appointees prior to convening the 32nd Alaska State Legislature.

The Alaska State Employees Association says members are dealing with the public and each other in ways that are contrary to Presidential recommendations. ASEA is looking to the state for protocols and other guidelines to increase workplace safety. No response yet from the Governor.

On the other hand, U.S. Congressman Don Young told seniors that COVID-19 fears are overblown.

The Senate recognized the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of universal women suffrage in the United States. Note that 107 years ago the Territorial Legislature granted Alaskan women the right to vote.

[SJR 18](#), that passed 16-0, asks the Lieutenant Governor to coordinate events around the state to celebrate women's progress and contributions. On to the other body.

The House has recognized Alaska's 229 federally recognized tribes. Sponsor Rep. Chuck Kopp explained that [HB 221](#) is designed to bring the state in line with long standing federal and US Supreme Court precedents. It would end an era of colonial thinking.

## **BUDGET ISSUES**

The House concurred in Senate amendments to the Supplemental Budget - [HB 234](#) - but failed by two votes to use the Constitutional Budget Reserve to fund additional money added by the Senate. Only \$360 million of the total are state funds, the rest federal. Options are under review.

The supplemental covers extra costs incurred between sessions (including Medicaid and firefighting), along with \$33.5 million for COVID-19 support and a few other things added by the Senate. We hear that more COVID-19 money will be in the operating budget.

The House version came in around \$265M. The 10 minority caucus House members who voted no called the Senate version bloated. Earlier, Senator Stedman apologized for the size – “I don't have a choice.”

To assist communities dealing with new costs of COVID-19, the bill boosts Community Assistance funding by \$10 million, and provides \$23.5 million in additional relief, including:

- \$8.5 million in grants to municipalities for COVID-19-related commercial passenger vessel operations;
- \$5.5 million for medical and protective equipment, including testing supplies;
- \$3.5 million for transportation to housing for medical assistance;
- \$2.5 million for housing individuals under quarantine;
- \$1.5 million for the state epidemiology lab for IT systems related to testing;
- \$1.5 million for personnel including lab, support, emergency operations, and 24-hour facility staff; and
- \$500,000 for public distribution of vital health recommendations and information.

The bill also provides funding for last year's unpaid wildfire and healthcare costs:

- \$142 million in state funds and \$160 million in federal funds for Medicaid services, including \$8.3 million to restore the Adult Preventive Dental Program;
- \$110.5 million for wildland firefighting costs incurred last summer and fall;

- \$8.6 million to restore Adult Public Assistance to ensure payments for low-income Alaskans;
- \$7.1 million for the Alaska Marine Highway System to ensure a stable schedule for the spring and summer of this year;
- \$6.7 million for the Department of Public Safety to address a shortfall within the Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers due to a lower than expected vacancy rate;
- \$6 million to help the Alaska Psychiatric Institute increase its capacity; and
- \$3 million to address the severe damage caused in Anchorage, Kenai, and Mat-Su by the December 2018 earthquake.

## **Budget Hearings for the week of March 16<sup>th</sup>**

Both House and Senate Finance committees are scheduled every day next week, including Saturday, to hear bills previously scheduled/heard.

**HFIN** is set to meet at **9am** and **1:30pm** and **SFIN** is set at **9am** each day. There will be NO in-person testimony - only telephonic or written testimony will be accepted.

Bills previously scheduled means, any bill that has been listed on the committees' agendas whether or not it has had a hearing.

Previously heard includes any bill the committee has actually heard at any point during the Legislature as long as it has not passed out of the committee.

Usually, bill numbers appear on the committee agenda the morning of the hearings—start looking at the daily calendar each morning.

It is also a good idea, knowing your bill's number, to look up the bill every morning to see if it's scheduled to be heard.

[SB 6](#) Pre-K; Elementary ED Program/Funding/Reading is set to be heard in **HEDC, Monday at 8am**, pending referral.

## **BILLS**

Both [HB 29](#) Insurance Coverage for Telehealth and [SB 101](#) establishing March 12<sup>th</sup> as Ashley Johnson-Barr Day was **signed into law this week**.

[HB 221](#) State Recognition of Tribes passed the House this week and was referred to STA and CRA in the Senate. It's first hearing in **SSTA** is scheduled for **Tuesday at 3:30pm**.

[SB 47](#) Physical/Occupational Therapy Board Practice passed the Senate on Friday. Bill read for the first time in the House. Referred to House Finance.

[SB 52](#) Alcohol Beverage Control; Alcohol Reg passed from HL&C and is awaiting a hearing in HFIN

## Hearings for the week of March 23rd:

As with the Finance Committees, many standing committees are meeting next week at their regular times with only “bills previously heard/scheduled” listed on their agendas.

NO in-person public testimony will be taken. Testimony will be accepted via telephone or written message.

**It is also a good idea, knowing your bill’s number, to look up the bill every morning to see if it is scheduled to be heard.**

**HJUD** does have a listed agenda for **Monday at 1:00pm**. They will be hearing [HB 307](#) Expanding Prisoner Access to Computers – *public testimony will be taken*; and [HB 250](#) Voter Registration Age [SB 55](#) Appointments to the Court of Appeals is listed with *public testimony being taken* pending referral

Referrals are given by the Speaker during Floor Sessions so it may be referred to JUD before Monday. If not, when it is referred, since the bill appeared on the schedule, it can be brought up at any meeting under the “bills previously scheduled/heard” agenda item.

**SHSS** also has a listed agenda for **Monday at 1:30pm**. [SB 179](#) Nursing; Licensure; Multistate Compact and [SB 229](#) Liability of Consulting Physicians will be heard.

**Tuesday at 3:30pm** **SSTA** *will take public testimony* on [HB 115](#) Absentee Voting and [HB 113](#) Military Family Employment Preference.

**SHSS** is also meeting on **Wednesday at 1:30pm** and will take up [HB 133](#) Juveniles: Justice; Facilities; Treatment and [SB 238](#) Involuntary Commitment; Protective Custody.

Also, on **Wednesday** **HL&C** meets at **3:30pm** and will hear [HB 86](#) Mental Health Hospital; Contracts/Bids and [HB 183](#) Alaska Psychiatric Institute.

## GOVERNOR'S CORNER

For the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak in Alaska visit: [DHSS COVID-19 Website](#)

Health mandates are listed here: [Health Mandates](#)

Governor Dunleavy announced a state economic stabilization team to recommend a “decisive” plan to shield our economy from COVID-19 effects.

Former Governor Sean Parnell and former US Senator Mark Begich will lead. The team includes state economic leaders and former elected officials.

The Governor said his economic plan already calls for an April \$1300 PFD. He also established a one billion dollar fund for disaster relief and took actions relating to workers, renters, homeowners, small business, health and safety equipment, health care facilities, and municipal aid.

More coming. [Alaska Economic Stabilization Plan](#)

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

“Alaska Caring Notes” is an initiative to encourage children who are home from school to take time to write notes, upload a drawing, or send a video to residents in nursing homes who are now sequestered.

Click the link to upload a picture or drawing or even a short video message, then hit send: <https://www.ashnha.com/alaska-caring-notes/> Sponsored by the Alaska State Hospital Nursing Home Association (ASHNA).

### Confirmation Hearings

<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>1:30pm</b> <b>3:00pm</b>	<b>SL&amp;C</b> Laura Patin, Board of Professional Counselors <b>HHSS</b> Steve Parker, State Medical Board
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>8am</b>	<b>HEDC</b> Lem Wheelles, Professional Teaching Practices Commission Cachet Garrett, UA Board of Regents Keith Hamilton, Board of Ed & Early Development Lorri Van Diest, Board of Ed & Early Development
	<b>1:30pm</b>	<b>SHSS</b> Larry Daugherty, State Medical Board
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>3pm</b>	<b>HHSS</b> Larry Daugherty, State Medical Board

## WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

**Check the committee calendar the day of the scheduled hearing as sometimes a bill is rescheduled at the last minute.**

**Website**-Daily Committee Hearings for March 23-28, 2020  
[Weekly Schedule](#)

**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**  
Testimony is call-in only until further notice.

### **CALL-IN NUMBERS**

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

**~ End of Report ~**

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