

# 2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32<sup>nd</sup> Alaska State Legislature ~ 1<sup>st</sup> Session

## Thirteenth Edition

~ 90<sup>th</sup> legislative day has arrived ~

### HIGHLIGHTS

Covid-19 rules, federal relief, budget, and the good ole PFD remain the main games this session. The Legislature and Administration are making progress, but fiscal unknowns and political differences may throw things off.

Senate Finance has taken its shot on disaster declaration matters. Early last week, Finance co-chair Click Bishop offered a Finance Committee Substitute for [HB 76](#). Next stop the Senate Rules then to the floor.

He said the primary goals of this middle of the road bill are to collect the \$8 million a month in federal food aid by the April 30 deadline, and assist with the response in areas like distributing vaccines. But he also listened to the Administration by proposing a more limited approach.

While the House extended the declaration to September 30, the Senate Finance CS extends it to December 31. Some R's, including President Micciche, have opposed any extension - no need.

The CS limits the Governor's emergency authority while granting more power to the DHSS Commissioner to declare a public health emergency, separate from a disaster declaration; requires legislative approval of federal Covid-19 relief spending; fixes the food aid snag, and includes behavioral health as providers of telehealth.

It also provides that individuals employed as firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, Peace officers, or health care providers, who contract COVID-19, are presumed to have contracted an occupational disease during work, and are eligible for workers compensation benefits.

One of the amendments adopted in SFIN prohibits money received under the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRSSAA), or the American Rescue Plan Act from being spent on abortions that are not mandatory under state law.

Senate HSS came to a screeching halt last week leaving on the table [SB 67](#), the nurses licensing compact bill opposed by the Alaska Nurses Association; and [SB 78](#), on Telehealth services. They both are back up Tuesday for final HSS action.

The pharmacists had a good day on Friday. House Labor and Commerce passed out [HB 145](#), relating to the practice of pharmacy. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Liz Snyder and now has seven co-sponsors.

The bill updates the current anti-discrimination statute to support insurance coverage of patient care services when provide by a pharmacist - one of the only healthcare professionals not listed in this statute. It also empowers the Board of Pharmacy to regulate pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy support staff. Scheduled in House HSS Tuesday.

As expected, Senator Shower just released his proposed CS to [SB 39](#). He says the bill is intended to “restore Alaska’s faith in the country’s elections...we can do better”. His first try wasn’t popular. This version attempts to respond to at least some of the critics. Find the sponsor statement here: [CSSB 39 Sponsor Statement](#)

More to come. The House is looking at elections, too. For example, Rep. Tuck’s proposal would expand the laws on voter registration and absentee ballots. [HB 66](#) will be heard in HJUD on Monday.

[SB 65](#) Liability Consulting Healthcare Provider sponsored by Sen. Kiehl passed the Senate on Monday and has been referred to HSS and JUD in the House. The bill describes circumstances when healthcare providers (physicians, podiatrists, osteopaths, advanced practice registered nurses, physician assistants, chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, and pharmacists) will be immune from civil liability for providing uncompensated consultation services.

## **BUDGET**

We’ve learned that House Finance will soon consider a list from Legislative Finance of budget items that are likely to be allowable expenses through the federal Covid-19 relief bills. They probably will start adding those dollars into the budget after they finish budget amendments early next week. The Senate plans to fine tune the House numbers as we all learn more.

The Legislature also is waiting for final spending guidance from the Feds due by May 10, ten days before the 121<sup>st</sup> day of session - the constitutional deadline for session’s end. They want to adjourn on time after passing the budget, but this will cut things close. Maybe too close, others say we are going 130 days.

Governor Dunleavy has a general plan for spending the money we’ll receive under the American Rescue Plan Act - tourism initiatives; business/organization relief; infrastructure investments for things like safe water, sewers, broadband; support for emergency domestic violence/sexual assault response costs and food security.

It appears that federal assistance equal to the amount we lost in revenue due to COVID can be used for services. Since we saw such a big drop in oil prices, this could possibly add hundreds of millions of these new dollars to the budget according to Legislative Finance.

Finance Co-chair, Senator Stedman, urges caution and points out that the federal injections of money won’t fix the structural deficit. We also need to be ready for any large batches of federal dollars that come after adjournment, he added.

There is other money too, like rental relief for Alaskans. This doesn’t require legislative action and goes directly to eligible groups. However, legislation is needed to spend the \$227 million in local government support. School funding issues are still under review.

And don’t forget the separate tribal financial support that’s available. Local expertise will be needed, especially for grant applications and general administration. AFN says they are here to help and would like to partner with the state.

Interesting facts: There are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States. \$1 billion will be allocated equitably between these tribes; and the Treasury Secretary, in her discretion with guardrails, will hand out an additional \$19 billion. Funds can be used to respond to the negative impacts of COVID-19.

## Budget Related Hearings for the week of April 19<sup>th</sup>

### Mon, April 19<sup>th</sup>

- 9am HFIN [HB 151](#) Unemployment Benefits for Covid-19
- 1:30pm HFIN [HB 169](#) Appropriation of Education; Pupil Transportation  
*Public testimony will be taken.*

### Tues, April 20<sup>th</sup>

- 11:30am (H) Ways & Means [HB 165](#) Approp; Earnings Reserve to Perm Fund  
[HJR1](#) Const. Amend: Permanent Fund; POMV; Earnings  
*Public testimony will be taken.*
- 12:30pm Senate Administration Budget Subcommittee-Closeout
- 3pm HSTA [HJR 7](#) Constitutional Amend; Perm Fund & PFDs  
[HB 73](#) Perm Fund; Advisory Vote

### Wed, April 21<sup>st</sup>

- 1:30pm HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 1:30pm SJUD [SB 53](#) Perm Fund; Advisory Vote
- 4pm Senate Public Safety Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

### Thurs, April 22<sup>nd</sup>

- 9am HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 11:30am (H) Ways & Means Economic Impact of Fiscal Solutions  
presentation by the Institute of Social & Economic Research (ISER)
- 1:30pm HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 5:30pm Senate LAW Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

### Fri, April 23<sup>rd</sup>

- 9am HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 1:30pm HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget

### Sat, April 24<sup>th</sup>

- 11am HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 11:30am (H) Ways & Means bills previously heard/scheduled

Toward the end of the week, Senate Finance shows “bills previously heard/scheduled” in the daily calendar. Look at the Daily Calendar on the day of the hearing to see which, if any, bills are listed on the day

## **BILLS On the Move**

### **Mon, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1pm HJUD**

[HB 66](#) Elections; Voting; Ballots sponsored by Rep. Tuck

### **Tues, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm SHSS**

[SB 67](#) Nursing; Licensure; Multi-State Compact

[SB 78](#) Health Care Services by Telehealth

[SB 80](#) Public Schools: Mental Health Education

### **Tues, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 3pm HSS**

[HB 145](#) Expand Pharmacist Authority- it moved from HL&C on Friday the 16<sup>th</sup>

[HB 58](#) Contraceptives Coverage; Insure; Med Assistance

### **Tues, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 3pm HSTA**

[HB 5](#) Sexual Assault; Def. of Consent

### **Tues, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 3:30pm SCRA**

[SB 46](#), Law Enforcement; Registry; Use of Force

### **Tues, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 3:30pm SSTA**

[SB 39](#) Ballot/Custody; Tampering; Voter Registration; Mail *public testimony will be taken*

The bill will also be heard on **Thursday the 22<sup>nd</sup>**

### **Wed, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 8am HEDC**

[HB 60](#) Public Schools: Mental Health Ed

[HB 164](#) Early Ed Programs; Reading; Virtual Ed -the bill will also be heard on **Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup>**

### **Wed, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1:30pm HFIN**

[HB 47](#) Council for Alaska Native Languages sponsored by Rep. Story moved from Tribal Affairs and had the STA referral replaced with FIN.

### **Wed, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1:30pm SJUD**

[SB 82](#) Elections; Election Investigations

### **Fri, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1pm HJUD**

[HB 174](#) Initiative Severability sponsored by Rep. Merrick was introduced on the 14<sup>th</sup> and is already scheduled for a hearing. The bill amends Initiative, Referendum, and Recall statutes to prohibit severability clauses in initiatives. If one clause is found unconstitutional, the lieutenant governor will be required to reject the entire initiative petition.

### **Fri, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1:30pm SJUD**

[SJR 4](#) Constitutional Amendment: Abortion/Funding

### **Sat, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 3pm HSTA**

[HB 51](#) Aggravating Factors at Sentencing sponsored by Rep. Josephson receives its first hearing. The bill adds sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of aggravating factors that can be used to lengthen sentences when a defendant knowingly directs their conduct toward a person because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

[HB 95](#) Elections; Election Investigations sponsored by the Governor receives its first hearing

## GOVERNOR'S CORNER

Governor Dunleavy has seen the light. He recently introduced legislation [SB 123](#) / [HB 170](#) to create an “energy independence fund”. This “green bank” would finance sustainable Alaska energy projects and could help move us faster in that direction.

SB 123 passed out of SL&C on Friday and is awaiting referral to SFIN.

HB 170 will be heard **Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:15 am H Energy**

***Public testimony will be taken.***

The Governor would seed the fund with \$10 million, to be matched with around \$130 million in federal money if a similar national bill - primarily sponsored by Democrats - passes Congress.

Don Young is a recent co-sponsor of the federal legislation but expect some local pushback.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### **Confirmation Hearings**

For a list of the Governor's appointees released March 1<sup>st</sup> click here:

[March 2021 Governor Appointments](#)

**Monday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 3:15pm**

HL&C will consider Casey Dschaak, Christopher Jaime, & Bruce Schulte for the Marijuana Control Board

**Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 3pm**

HSTA will consider James Cockrell for Commissioner of Public Safety

## WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

**Website:** Daily Committee Hearings for April 5-10, 2021: [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 Alaska Schedule - KTOO](#)

**Streaming Video** [alaskalegislaturetv](#)

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**~ End of Report ~**

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