

2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32nd Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

Fifteenth Edition

*~ Legislature acts on COVID-19; Governor says yes – and no
Pace quickens as leadership shoots for 121 day; House trying to pass a budget ~*

HIGHLIGHTS

It was a long Wednesday but after 7 hours, 41 proposed amendments and a few bill changes, the Senate passed [HB 76](#) (14-6) that would extend the COVID-19 disaster emergency declaration, among other things. The House quickly agreed to the Senate version of their bill, 25-15.

The Governor reviewed it Thursday and signed on Friday just ahead of the deadline for securing millions in federal aid. Commissioner Crum then issued a more limited public health emergency order under the new law, followed by Dunleavy's declaration that the disaster is over.

Crum said it's time to give Alaskans a break - the new order is "very prescribed, very narrow" but will make sure Alaska can continue our response to COVID-19 issues.

HB 76 is retroactive to February 14 when the disaster declaration expired and extends it to December 31st, but the Governor can and did terminate early. The bill includes a variety of other targeted provisions that also have been part of the ongoing Capitol COVID conversation.

One of the proposed amendments submitted on the Senate Floor would have ended the declaration but retain elements of the bill requested by the Governor – "Disaster declaration lite". It failed by a close vote of 9-11.

Supporter Senator Costello said that instead of declaring a disaster we should declare a victory. But, Senator Stedman pointed out that every other state still has an emergency declaration in place; and our border issues and resurgent outbreaks make it hard to pretend it's over.

The Governor had the final say and we have officially transitioned from disaster to recovery. See the Executive Proclamation here: [Proclamation](#)

Due to COVID-19 complications, the Department of Homeland Security is extending the REAL ID full enforcement date to May 3, 2023. The former date was October 1, 2021, coming soon. Now, beginning 2023 every air passenger over 18 will need to comply with the new Identification standards.

No vaccine passports needed for travelers to Alaska, according to Governor Dunleavy when he released [Administrative Order No. 321](#), effective Monday. He said we lead the nation with response and vaccination rates and have effectively protected our vulnerable citizens. He welcomes visitors back.

On the other hand, airport testing may have paid off by contributing to relatively low rates of coronavirus infection in the state, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recent morbidity and mortality report.

The Alaska travel industry is preparing for who knows what as we quickly approach summertime. Pandemic uncertainty plagues many but there is hope for a strong independent tourist season; and some still cling to the long shot that state and federal leaders can fix the big cruise ship problem.

In other news:

[HB 123](#) State Recognition of Tribes sponsored by Rep. Zulkosky is moving through the legislative process – two House committees so far, now ready for the floor. It would require the state to formally recognize Alaska’s 229 tribes.

Supporters say this will show respect, improve coordination, and provide access to resources. It’s companion, [SB 108](#) State Recognition of Tribes sponsored by Sen. Olson is scheduled for a hearing on Tuesday in SSTA.

In a pre-lawsuit, out of court, no admission of guilt settlement, Alaska paid \$85,000 to a former employee of the state’s Arts Council who lost her job due to a budget veto, got involved in the Recall effort and then was blackballed for anti-Dunleavy statements when funding was restored, and she re-applied for the job.

Other, similar state job termination challenges are pending, including one by a former longtime assistant AG who is an unabashed critic of the Governor.

A study that looked at Alaska law enforcement of potentially lethal encounters between police and citizens found that 2/3 of them involved persons with signs of mental illness. It also found that 55 people were killed by Alaska law enforcement between 2010-2020. The new Anchorage Acting Police Chief appreciated the report and the difficult conversation that will help his agency and others do better policing.

Some are hoping this will help move Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson’s police reform bills. SB1 & SB4 are scheduled this Thursday in Senate State Affairs.

Alaska’s population is up by 3% since the last census but well below the US average of 7.4% growth. Our total population is 733,391. We are #48 - Wyoming and Vermont have fewer residents. California remains king with well over 39 million people. There are a grand total of 331,449,281 US citizens.

BUDGET

The House operating ([HB 69](#)) and mental health ([HB 71](#)) budgets moved from House Finance Thursday night after 13 hours and many proposed amendments. Efforts to add a full PFD with a \$2B price tag were unsuccessful.

HB 69 then hit the floor Friday. They’re still going - many amendments. So far, they haven’t set the PFD amount but Saturday they were one vote away from authorizing a full dividend at a cost of around \$2 billion.

Note: House leaders recently proposed a \$500 dividend in a separate spending bill at a cost of about \$355 million.

Meanwhile, Senate Finance is closing out its budget subcommittees and the just passed House budget bills are already scheduled this week, Monday - Friday. The capital budget ([SB 50](#) and [HB 70](#)) is back on the table.

Budget Hearings for the week of May 3rd

Pending referral, SFIN has scheduled the operating budget [HB 69](#) and the mental health budget [HB 71](#) for hearings **each day (M-F) at 9am.**

HFIN has scheduled the capital budget [HB 70](#) for hearing **each day starting Tuesday at 1:30pm**

Mon, May 3rd

1:30pm SJUD [SJR 6](#) Constitutional Amend; Permanent Fund & PFDs
[SJR 5](#) Constitutional Amend; Approp. Limit; Budget Reserve
[SJR 7](#) Constitutional Amend; State Tax; Voter Approval

Tues, May 4th

3pm HSTA [HJR 7](#) Constitutional Amend; Perm Fund & PFDs
[HB 73](#) Perm Fund; Advisory Vote
[HB 142](#) PFD Eligibility

Public testimony will be taken on each bill.

5:30pm Senate Department of Corrections Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

5:30pm (H)Ways & Means [HB 189](#) Employment Tax for Education *public testimony will be taken* it will also be heard on **Thursday, the 6th at 11:30am**-invitation testimony only

Wed, May 5th

9 am SFIN [HB 169](#) Approp. Education; Pupil Transportation

5:30pm Senate Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development
Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

Thurs, May 6th

11:30am (H)Ways & Means [HB 189](#) Employment Tax for Education

3pm HSTA [HJR 7](#) Constitutional Amend; Perm Fund & PFDs
[HB 73](#) Perm Fund; Advisory Vote

Fri, May 7th

1:30pm SJUD [SJR 5](#) Constitutional Amend; Approp. Limit; Budget Reserve
[SJR 7](#) Constitutional Amend; State Tax; Voter Approval

BILLS On the Move

[HB 164](#) Early Ed Programs; Reading; Virtual Ed will be heard in HEDC at 8am on Monday and Wednesday; 6:30pm on Thursday *public testimony will be taken*; 8am on Friday; and 9am on Saturday *public testimony will be taken*

Mon, May 3rd, 9am SFIN

[SB 9](#) Alcohol Beverage Control; Alcohol Reg

Mon, May 3rd, 1:30pm HFIN

[HB 157](#) APOC; Report Referenda/Recall Contributor

Mon, May 3rd, 3:30pm SRES

[SB 121](#) PFAS Use & Remediation; Fire/Water Safety

Tues, May 4th, 8am HCRA

[HR 8](#) Poverty and Opportunity Task Force sponsored by Rep. Tarr would create a House Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity, consisting of 23 members from the Alaska State House, members of the public, and outside experts representing community groups, local and tribal government, and other important stakeholders.

The Speaker of the House will choose the members of this task force, which will provide a report and policy recommendations to the legislature and the public. The bill will also be heard on **Thursday at 8am when *public testimony will be taken***

Tues, May 4th, 8am H Tribal Affairs

[HB 184](#) Require Tribal Child Welfare Compact *public testimony will be taken*

Tues, May 4th, 1:30pm SHSS

[SB 124](#) Mental Health Facilities & Meds will also be heard on **Thursday at 1:30pm**

Tues, May 4th, 3:30pm SSTA

[SB 39](#) Ballot/Custody; Tampering; Voter Registration; Mail-the bill is expected to pass from committee as it also has hearing scheduled **pending referral in SJUD on Friday at 1:30pm and Saturday at 10am**

[SB 126](#) Repeal 90-day Session Limit *public testimony will be taken*

[SB 108](#) State Recognition of Tribes *public testimony will be taken*

[SB 109](#) Council for Alaska Native Languages *public testimony will be taken*

Thurs, May 6th, 3pm HSTA

[HB 66](#) Elections; Voting; Ballots

Thurs, May 6th, 3:30pm SSTA

[SB 1](#) Chokehold Ban sponsored by Sen. Gray-Jackson receives its first hearing The bill amends AS 11.81.370, the statute regarding use of force by a peace officer in making an arrest or terminating an escape by adding a new subsection that would prohibit the use of potentially lethal restraints.

[SB 4](#), Prohibit Peace Officer Shoot Moving Vehicle sponsored by Sen. Gray-Jackson receives its first hearing. The bill prohibits officers from shooting at a moving vehicle unless the person is driving in a manner that poses an immediate threat of serious risk to the life of the officer or another person.

[SB 115](#) Address Confidentiality Program sponsored by Sen. Kiehl receives its first hearing. The bill adds peace officers, correctional officers, and municipal correctional officers to the list of people whose addresses can be kept confidential in court proceedings and under other certain circumstances.

[SB 82](#) Elections; Election Investigations moved from SJUD on the 26th and receives its first hearing in SSTA *Public testimony will be taken on all the bills.*

Fri, May 7th, 8am HL&C

[HB 58](#) Contraceptives Coverage; Insure; Med Assist *public testimony will be taken*

HSTA and HHSS show hearings on Saturday for bills previously scheduled/heard-check the schedule

BILL Updates

[HB 145](#) Expand Pharmacist Authority is in HRLS awaiting Floor action.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The House and Senate will meet in **Joint Session on Monday at 11am** to hear from U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan.

HL&C will hear a presentation on Women in the Workforce and the Gender Pay Gap during their **3:15pm Wednesday hearing**.

Kathy Baldwin Johnson & Jared Parish will present on the Children's Justice Act Task Force to **HHSS on Thursday at 3pm**.

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Website: Daily Committee Hearings for May 3-8, 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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