

2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32nd Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

Sixteenth Edition

~ *Happy Nurses Week & Happy Mother's Day*

Count down – 12 days left

HIGHLIGHTS

Committees are starting to close down. Senate Health and Social Services Committee Chair Senator Wilson said May 6th was their last day. With the Disaster Declaration battle behind them, the Budget re-occupied center stage last week - then the House had a nervous breakdown.

After an already long day of operating budget amendments, minority members of all stripes protested loudly when the Speaker rejected as too late dozens of new amendments they say were introduced on time. This anger between camps has been simmering for a while.

Speaker Stutes eventually sent [HB 69](#) (operating budget) and [HB 71](#) (mental health budget) back to Rules where they still sit. Note that the Speaker's 21st solid vote is out of town with his wife and new little girl.

So, we'll see what happens during Monday's House floor session when the budget bills are back on the calendar.

In the meantime, Senate Finance Committee budget subcommittees completed work and Co-Chair Stedman introduced a CS to the full committee that proposes what he calls the base. There is a rough balance between revenues and expenditures but little or no room for the PFD.

Which takes us right back to the beginning - how big the PFD should be; how are we going to pay for it? Keep in mind they haven't yet spent the federal money, which can be used for a variety of purposes and may allow swapping of state money with COVID dollars to pay for the dividend.

Federal spending rules are expected Monday. Of course, Special Session speculation abounds. Some predict one for spending the federal money; some expect a dividend only focus. Others scoff – there is still time to get it done in 121. Leaders remain hopeful but realistic.

The capital budget is also hostage to the slowdown. Until they figure out the other stuff it's hard to settle on an amount and project list. Governor Dunleavy's GO bond legislation to pay for infrastructure (reported earlier this year) seems to be lost in the shuffle.

As we mentioned last time, the Governor signed [HB 76](#) and ended the Disaster Declaration after Commissioner Crum issued a Public Health Emergency Order under the new law: [Public-Health-Order-Emergency](#). The Order “continues the process of mitigating COVID-19 impacts”. It stays in effect until rescinded or the federal act expires.

Several key areas of concern are covered: vaccination; testing supply distribution throughout the state; procurement; contract tracing assistance to tribes; best practice advice to the public; disease

surveillance; maintaining federal benefits to support these efforts, like food assistance and sheltering.

Kids get COVID too. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children now account for a fifth of new coronavirus cases in the states that release data by age. A year ago, COVID cases only accounted for 3%. By the way, 18-24 year olds generally have the highest numbers of all groups says the CDC.

While nearly 50% of Alaskans over 16 are vaccinated, nearly half of the 1200 randomly selected Alaskans who responded to a recent survey said they haven't received a COVID-19 vaccine yet nor booked an appointment. Half of that group said they probably or definitely never will.

Early learning and literacy legislation is alive and well. [HB 164](#), the House counterpart to [SB 111](#), was heard all week in the House. House and Senate language now matches. Very complicated topics so a bill may nor may not make it to the Governor this year.

Senate Judiciary spent some time on various constitutional amendments last week to address the dividend ([SJR 6](#)), a spending limit ([SJR 5](#)) and voter approval of state taxes. Senate Resources took up PFAS use and remediation ([SB 121](#)).

The court system suffered a cyber-attack recently, but the Chief Justice said they didn't get a ransom demand or direct message from the bad guys. The attack caused the system to disconnect online services. Back to normal as soon as possible after the malware is removed and they plug the hole.

We will soon have a new Chief Justice of the Alaska Supreme Court. The other justices selected Daniel Winfree unanimously on Wednesday. Starting in July with the retirement of current Chief Justice Bolger, Winfree will preside over Supreme Court arguments and be the administrative head of Alaska's judicial branch of government. He's the first Chief Justice born in Alaska and the second from Fairbanks.

BUDGET

Budget Hearings for the week of May 10th

Similar to last week, **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 **Monday and Wednesday at 1:30pm**

SFIN also has scheduled meetings at **1pm each day Monday-Friday** with the listing of bills previously scheduled or heard--look at the Daily Calendar on the day of the hearing to see which, if any, bills are listed on the day

Mon, May 10th

1:30pm

SJUD [SJR 6](#) Constitutional Amend; Permanent Fund & PFDs

Tues, May 11th

11:30am

(H) Ways & Means [HB 202](#) Permanent Fund Dividend; Royalties-will also be heard on **Thursday and if still in the committee on **Saturday** [HB 37](#) Income Tax; Permanent Fund; Earnings Reserve will also be heard on **Thursday and Saturday****

Wed, May 12th

9am

HFIN [HJR 1](#) Constitutional Amendment; Permanent Fund; POMV; Earnings

BILLS On the Move

Mon, May 10th, 1:30pm SJUD

[SB 7](#) State Trooper Policies; Public Access

Tues, May 11th, 3pm HSTA

[HB 198](#) AK Community Health Aide Appreciation Day sponsored by Rep. Zulkosky establishes September 10th each year as Alaska Community Health Aide Appreciation Day. The bill will also be heard on **Thursday** when *public testimony will be taken*

Tues, May 11th, 3:30pm SCRA

[SB 136](#) Limitations on Firearms Restrictions sponsored by Sen. Myers was introduced on May 5th. It will also be heard on **Thursday** when *public testimony will be taken*

Wed, May 12th, 8am HEDC

[HB 164](#) Early Ed Programs; Reading; Virtual Ed will **also be heard on Friday**

Thurs, May 13th, 9am SFIN

[SB 111](#) Early Ed Programs; Reading; Virtual Ed

Thurs, May 13th, 3:30pm SCRA

[SB 135](#) AK Community Health Aide Appreciation Day sponsored by Sen. Kawasaki is the companion to HB 198 *public testimony will be taken*

Both S and HFIN as well as HSTA and HHSS show hearings on Saturday for bills previously scheduled/heard-check the schedule.

BILL Updates

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

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

The Governor just signed [Administrative Order No. 322](#) that sets up a task force to address the “growing need for reliable, high speed connectivity for all Alaskans”. It will be made up of 13 members but only 11 can vote. They’ll focus on identifying communities that need to be connected and upgraded.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The House and Senate will meet in **Joint Session on Tuesday at 11am** for consideration of the Governor’s appointments to Boards & Commissions.

Developing Leadership in Alaska’s Schools, a presentation by the Alaska Council of School Administrators will be heard in **SEDC on Wednesday at 9am**

~ End of Report ~

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