

# 2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

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

## Eighteenth Edition

~ *One door closes, another opens* ~

### HIGHLIGHTS

Time flies. The regular session has come and gone. But there are still things to do, and the first Special Session called by the Governor is already underway. After 121 days, the big issues – Budget and PFD – remain in limbo and will be the laser focus of this renewed conversation.

The Legislature also was asked by the Governor to resolve the long term future of the dividend through a constitutional amendment. Senator Micciche and others say they would prefer to address that during the second special session in August where they will develop a complete fiscal plan.

The House took care of some priority bills and adjourned close to midnight Wednesday after failing to agree with Senate operating budget changes to [HB 69](#) (and [HB 71](#)).

The Senate adjourned at the actual last minute - 11:59pm - following a long day of 42 proposed budget amendments.

Their final \$6.2 billion product includes a capital budget (largest in years), and a \$2300ish dividend that required a controversial draw from the permanent fund. The operations piece is fairly flat compared to last year.

The Senate day started with a \$1,000 dividend set by Senate Finance but they increased it through a Floor amendment by Senator Shower. He first tried for \$3,500 (current formula). It failed 10-10. His \$2,300 second effort (Governor's new 50/50 formula) passed 12-8.

They also adopted several other amendments, including one by Senator Wielechowski that says the Legislature intends to give “return to work” payments, similar to a Montana program where unemployed Alaskans would receive a one-time payment of \$1,200 when they accept a job.

Bills passed and sent to the Governor on the last day include Alaska Marine Highway reorganization ([HB 63](#)), fisheries landing tax credit extension ([HB 182](#)), industrial hemp ([SB 27](#)) and military spouse courtesy license ([SB 12](#)).

Pre-K and early learning legislation got much time and attention this round but will have to wait until 2022 for final resolution. A number of other popular items are also on “official pause” until next year – e.g., tribal recognition, pharmacists’ fee equity and election reform.

The Budget Conference Committee organized Thursday and will get cracking this week. Members include Reps. Foster, Merrick and Thompson, and Sens. Stedman, Bishop, and Olson. In addition to settling budget and PFD differences, Conferees will allocate the federal COVID-19 support.

Note: Here we go again. If the operating budget ([HB 69](#)) isn't signed by June 1 many state employees will receive contractually required layoff notices, effective July 1 if no budget deal.

## **More news:**

The state is launching a mobile platform for Alaskans to show they are vaccinated. The Dunleavy Administration won't require vaccine passports but are comfortable with this option that will let Alaskans look up and display their COVID-19 vaccination record. It's called [MyIRMobile](#)

Trying again. The Marine Highway System has been going downhill for years. A bill ([HB 63](#)) is on the Governor's desk creating a new oversight board to help figure out where to go from here.

Speaker Stutes (Kodiak) sponsored it; one of several recommendations made by a Governor's working group last year to help reform our ancient marine Highway system and plan for the future. As we understand, forward funding also is in the works.

Hope has turned the corner. The U.S. House unanimously approved the measure allowing large cruise ships to skip Canadian ports on their way to Alaska (Alaska Tourism Restoration Act -H.R. 1318). The President should see it soon after a procedural vote in the Senate. He's expected to sign.

Our Congressional Delegation worked hard on this long shot legislation. Don Young says he's very excited. At least one cruise line now plans to sail in August. A few more CDC rules still need tweaks, but optimism seems to prevail. Will there be a market?

GCI plans to roll out 2-gig (now 1-gig) service next year, among the fastest in the US - "from Fairbanks to Juneau, everyone on the road and our fiber network", according to CEO Ron Duncan. As we understand, remote places (e.g., Nome, Kotzebue, Aleutians) will get 1-gig upgrades.

## **BILLS on the Move**

[HJR 7](#) Constitutional Amendment; Permanent Fund; PFDs sponsored by the Governor is set to be heard in **HJUD on Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday the 26<sup>th</sup> at 1pm *public testimony will be taken on Monday***

## **Hearings of Interest**

The Redistricting Board will hold a hearing on **Wednesday the 26<sup>th</sup> at 2:30pm**. They will be meeting in both open and executive session, discussing the hiring of a Voting Rights Act consultant. *To participate in public testimony*, citizens may call: Anchorage--(907) 563-9085; Juneau (907) 586-9085; Other locations (844) 586-9085

## **BILL Updates**

Bills passed both bodies during the First Session can be found here: [Bills Passed 1st Session](#)

Bills not included in Special Session calls will pick up where they left off when the Second Session convenes in January 2022.

[SB 10](#) Free/Reduced Tuition for Essential Worker moved through the Senate and was referred to EDC and FIN in the House on 5/18

[SB 38](#) Naturopaths; Licensing; Practice sits in SL&C

[SB 39](#) Ballot Custody/Tampering; Voter Reg; Mail spent most of Session in SSTA; moved to SJUD on 5/7

[SB 46](#) Law Enforcement Registry; Use of Force moved from SCRA on 5/18 and sits in SSTA

[SB 67](#) Nursing; Licensure; Multi-state Compact failed to move from SHSS on 4/20

[SB 80](#) Public Schools; Mental Health Education moved from SHSS on 4/20 and sits in SFIN  
Companion bill [HB 60](#) sits in HFIN. Rep. Story added as co-sponsor on 5/19

[SB 82](#) Elections; Election Investigations is being held in SSTA, its' second committee of referral in the Senate

[SB 83](#) Elections; Voting; Ballot Requirements is being held in SSTA, it's second committee of referral in the Senate

[SB 121](#) PFAS Use & Remediation; Fire/Water Safety stays in its' first committee of referral, RES

[SB 122](#) Victim Definition is in HRLS awaiting Floor action

[SJR 4](#) Constitutional Amend; Abortion/Funding made it through to SFIN

[HB 5](#) Sexual Assault; Definition of Consent picked up fiscal notes on 5/6 and received a FIN referral after JUD.

[HB 25](#) Public Schools; Social Emotional Learning sits in HSTA.

[HB 58](#) Contraceptive Coverage; Insure; Med Assist sits in L&C

[HB 110](#) Age for Nicotine; E-Cig; Tax E-Cig sits in HFIN  
Companion bill [SB 45](#) has been in SFIN since March

[HB 123](#) State Recognition of Tribes passed the House on 5/19 and was transmitted to the Senate

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

### **WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS**

**Website:** Daily Committee Hearings for May 24-29, 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** [alaskalegislaturet](#)

**Contacting your Legislator/Testifying** – The Capitol remains closed to the public.

Click here for legislators' email addresses: [Legislator Email Address List](#)

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**~ End of Report ~**

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