

2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32nd Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

Fifth Edition

~ *House sort of organizes-Senate rolling right along* ~

HIGHLIGHTS

At long last, the House officially organized under Rep. Louise Stutes of Kodiak, 22-18. But, in a possible first, the duly elected Speaker still only has 20 votes she can count on - no working majority!

While (R) Rep. Merrick finally joined the multi-partisan coalition, (D) Rep. Tarr left after voting for the new organization. Tarr is the former Resources Co-Chair who caucused with the D's for eight years.

This time she'll be an independent D and said she was uncomfortable with all the power jockeying for leadership roles. Rep. Rasmussen also went maverick, voted for the Stutes team but will be an independent R.

Merrick is now Co-Chair of House Finance, along with Rep. Foster. Former Speaker Edgmon is Rules Chair; Rep. Tuck is Majority Leader; Freshman Rep. Patkotak will run Resources; Health & Social Services will be Co-Chaired by Rep. Zulkosky and newcomer Liz Snyder, Education Co-Chairs will be Drummond and Story. Tilton is the new Minority Leader.

Look here for standing committees' memberships: [Standing Committees](#)

Chief Justice Joe Bolger addressed the Legislature for the last time. He plans to retire in June. He said the court system has been "resilient" during the COVID challenge. They've done a good job complying with health requirements and still getting business done. Digital options made a huge difference.

Criminal jury trials have been the biggest problem since face-to-face proceedings are essential to proper justice but generally that hasn't been possible due to courtroom size and travel needs. Starting soon, Judges will have the option to hold jury trials in person.

Justice Bolger also opposed efforts by Senator Mike Shower and others to change the way we select district court and appellate judges. Bolger said our merit based, non-partisan system is the best in the US and there is no good reason to tinker with it. Critics say conservative candidates tend to get the short straw.

Juneau Superior Court **Judge Philip Pallenberg** has ruled for the Legislature and against the Governor. He found that 94 unconfirmed executive branch individuals served illegally between December 16 and January 18 after the legislative deadline for confirmation, including the Revenue Commissioner.

They were legally reappointed January 19. The Legislative Council didn't ask the court to undo actions taken during the co-called recess appointment period. This was a matter of principle regarding the constitutional allocation of power between branches.

BUDGET ISSUES

Budget Hearings for the week of February 22nd

Mon, Feb 22nd, 7:45am	Senate Health and Social Services Subcommittee
3pm	<i>House</i> Finance hears the Revenue forecast from Dept. of Revenue Commissioner Mahoney and Chief Economist Stickel
4pm	Senate Public Safety Finance Subcommittee will review the VPSO Program; Violent Crimes Compensation Board; Criminal Justice Information Systems; and Statewide Support
5:30pm	Senate Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee
Tues, Feb 23rd, 7:30am	Senate LAW Finance Subcommittee
9am	SFIN OMB update on Deferred Maintenance
12:30pm	Senate Administration Finance Subcommittee
1:30pm	HFIN Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation, CEO Rodell
3:30pm	SSTA SB53 Permanent Fund; Advisory Vote SJR6 Constitutional Amendment: Permanent Funds and PFD SJR5 Constitutional Amendment: Appropriation Limit; Budget Reserve SJR 7 Constitutional Amendment: State Tax; Voter Approval
5:15pm	Senate Judiciary Finance Subcommittee
5:30pm	Senate Corrections Finance Subcommittee
Wed, Feb 24th, 9am	SFIN Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, CEO Abbott
1:30pm	HFIN Overview Governor's FY22 Budget; 10-year plan, OMB Director Steininger
4pm	Senate Public Safety Finance Subcommittee
Thurs, Feb 25th, 1pm	Senate Education & Early Development Finance Subcommittee
1:30pm	HFIN Overview Governor's FY22 Budget Amendments; OMB Director Steininger; FY22 Fiscal Overview, Legislative Finance Director Painter
3:30pm	SSTA SB25 State Government Finances; Website
5:30pm	Senate LAW Finance Subcommittee-Civil and Criminal Divisions
Fri, Feb 26th, 7:45am	Senate Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee
1:30pm	HFIN HB 76 Extending Covid-19 Disaster Emergency

BILLS On the Move

Tues, Feb 23rd, 1:30pm SHSS

[SB 67](#), Nursing; Licensure; Interstate Compact sponsored by the Governor receives its' first hearing with invited testimony only. The bill allows Alaska to adopt the Multistate Nurse Licensure Compact. The Multistate Nurse Licensure Compact would allow Registered and Practical Nurses in any of the 34 participating states to practice in Alaska without being subject to Alaska's licensing process. It would also provide Alaska nurses with a multistate license to practice in the other 34 participating states.

The Compact would establish a commission with rulemaking, enforcement, and financial assessment provisions. Alaska would appoint one person to be the compact administrator within the state. The single-state and multi-state nurse licensing programs would have separate receipt support funding, which means the multistate licensing program will not impact the costs for the single-state licensees.

SB 67 would not affect Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs), Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) or anyone else who wishes to practice under an Alaska-only nursing license.

It will be heard again on **Thursday** and *Public testimony will be taken*

Wed, Feb 24th, 1:30pm SL&C

[SB 86](#) Temporary Permits and Licenses, sponsored by Senate Labor & Commerce

Thurs, Feb 25th, 1:00pm H Arctic Policy

[HJR 11](#) Waiver From Passenger Vessel Services Act, sponsored by Rep. McKay is similar to [SJR 9](#) sponsored by Sen. Kiehl. (SJR 9 moved from STRA last week and is now waiting a hearing in SL&C.) HJR 11 only urges Congress to pass legislation that provides a temporary waiver of the Passenger Vessel Services Act to allow cruise ships to sail directly to the state from other United States ports.

Thurs, Feb 25th, 3:30pm SSTA

[SB 39](#) Ballot/Custody; Tampering; Voter Registration; Mail sponsored by Sen. Shower. This will be the bill's 5th hearing-invited testimony only

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

In spite of last minute pleas by the health care and business communities, Governor Dunleavy decided not to extend the COVID-19 Disaster Declaration. He said it's time to focus on recovery and issued a memo with "advisories". He called this a new beginning - to mixed reviews.

See the advisories here: [COVID-19 Health Advisories](#)

The Governor said they'd continue to operate as before, including state employee mitigation measures. Health care providers and local governments still worry about possible impacts.

Commissioners will closely examine and decide the fate of some 200 formerly suspended regulations that deal with everything from vaccination authority to telemedicine to curbside booze pickup.

Race against the variants. Thinking ahead, health officials also are worrying about coronavirus variants that are spreading around the globe and hope to speed up Alaska vaccinations. So far, 58% of Alaskans 65 or older have received a COVID 19 vaccine.

Governor Dunleavy told Senator Reinbold in writing that he's had it with her COVID 19 misinformation campaign and is done with the Senate Judiciary Committee. He said Reinbold was unethical and violated her oath of office.

Reinbold, who's been overly critical of the Administration's COVID policies and management, initially said Dunleavy was acting like a disgruntled legislator, not a Governor. Old-timer and former Senate President Gary Stevens said he'd never seen this kind of letter from a Governor.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

HEDC will hear from DEED Commissioner Johnson discussing 2021 student enrollment and Covid-19 Federal Relief funding on **Wednesday at 8:00am**

Wednesday at Noon, Legislative Budget and Audit meets to organize, elect a chair and vice chair and hear an overview of the committee process by Legislative Auditor Curtis and Legislative Fiscal Analyst Painter

SHSS will consider **Executive Order 119-DHSS Reorganization** on **Thursday, Feb 25th 3pm**
Here is a FAQ on the order from the Governor's Office: [DHSS Reorganization](#)

SEDC and HEDC will meet jointly at **9am on Friday the 26th** to hear a presentation "Emerging Issues from the Field" from the Alaska Council of School Administrators, the Alaska Superintendents Association, the Alaska Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the Alaska Association of School Business Officials and the Alaska Staff Development Network

HL&C will meet at **3:15pm on Friday, the 26th**, to hold an informational hearing on Pandemic-related Job Losses and Rebuilding Alaska's Economy

Confirmation Hearings

Monday, Feb 22nd 1:30pm SL&C will consider Dana Walukiewicz, Diane Thompson, and John Cox for the Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) Board

Wednesday, Feb 24th 9am SEDC will consider Jennifer Stafford, Lem Wheelles, Adam Reid, Jamie Burgess for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; and Dale Anderson and Ralph Seekins for the University of Alaska Board of Regents

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Note to our readers: *Each day, our legislators don masks and pass through temperature scanning kiosks before they enter their bubble to do our business in what has become a public free zone. Zooms, streams, texts, phones, emails, Gavel-to-Gavel and other work arounds are the best we can do to stay involved. We urge you to participate and make sure they know we're still watching!*

Website: Daily Committee Hearings for February 22-26, 2021
[Weekly Schedule](#)

Check Calendar Daily – Bills Can Be Rescheduled at Sponsor's/Chair Request

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](#)

Contacting your Legislator/Testifying - The Capitol building is closed to the public during the pandemic. There are no plans for in-person visits or testimony.

Contact your local Legislative Information Office (LIO) to learn how to participate in legislative hearings: [LIO Offices](#)

You also can call using the following numbers.

Tell operator which hearing and bill number you are calling to testify on.

Here's the LIO call-in information for testimony:

If calling from a Juneau phone number: 586-9085

If calling from an Anchorage phone number: 563-9085

If calling from any other number: 844-586-9085

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

Click here for legislative staff contacts: [Staff List](#)

~ End of Report ~

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