

2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32nd Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

Eighth Edition

~ *Senate puts foot down; House up and running; Governor feeling better* ~

HIGHLIGHTS

Never mind! After weeks of work, in a surprise but wise reversal, Governor Dunleavy withdrew EO 119 that would have split the Department of Health and Social Services in two. The Governor cited “technical issues” and avoided a losing battle.

A wary Legislature and many members of the public had legal, policy and technical concerns with his approach. Opponents appeared to have the votes to disapprove it in a Joint Session scheduled for this week.

There is support for the concept. Commissioner Crum wants to partner with legislators and others to try again. Rep. Spohnholz pointed out that the Legislature played an important role here. How you do things is as important as what you do, she said.

Enough is enough. Senator Reinbold keeps refusing to follow the COVID rules and the Senate has spoken up. Possibly for the first time in history, they voted 18-1 to allow leaders to exclude Reinbold from most in person legislative activities. A spike in COVID cases in the halls led to this action, according to President Micciche.

Enforcement began immediately after the floor session when Senator Reinbold tried to convene a Judiciary meeting – that she chairs - and Senate President Micciche let her know the meeting was cancelled due to “unsafe conditions”. They’ll provide office space for her outside the Capitol during the standoff.

Reinbold is banned from the building - except the Senate gallery during sessions - until she complies with the rules.

Micciche later said he didn’t fully appreciate the threat the disease poses to people until his aide and close friend caught COVID and landed in the hospital.

Governor Dunleavy is on the mend from his bout with COVID-19. Contact tracing indicates he may have picked it up at an Alaska Outdoor Council banquet on February 20, attended by Rep. Cronk who tested positive on Feb. 24. Other Legislators and a mayoral candidate were there too.

Rumor has it that a new, lighter Senate COVID 19 Disaster Emergency bill is coming soon. In the meantime, hearings on [HB 76](#), emergency disaster extension provisions, are underway in the House. The issues include federal food stamp funding; the ability to shift vaccine supplies between communities; and airport tests.

Alaska is first in the nation to offer COVID-19 vaccines to anyone 16 or older thanks to a quick rollout of extra doses from tribal health care providers and an effective system that includes the Indian Health Service, Alaska Native health services, municipalities, businesses, and the state. Wow.

Giant leap for mankind. Fully vaccinated Americans can gather with other vaccinated people indoors without wearing a mask or social distancing, according to the CDC.

Former Chief of Staff Ben Stevens' new job with ConocoPhillips is back in the news. This time, the Alaska Public Interest Research Group contends the Governor and Mr. Stevens failed to follow Alaska's employment ethics laws that apply to public officials when they leave state service.

They asked Attorney General Treg Taylor to investigate. Previously, both the Department of Law and ConocoPhillips said they were mindful of these restrictions.

Go figure. Alaska now spends more on prisons than the University of Alaska, a role reversal. Since 2015, the budget has been cut by 22.4% for state agency operations, except in the Department of Corrections whose inflation based budget has actually grown. "Sad", said Finance Co-Chair, Click Bishop.

Alaska Supreme Court Chief Justice Joel Bolger ordered the return of Misdemeanor jury trials starting April 19. It's been a year since they were suspended due to the pandemic. Presiding judges in each judicial district still have discretion to suspend trials based on public health considerations.

Debate continues on the wisdom of the Governor's proposed budget and \$5,000 PFD. As we earlier reported, critics argue that big PFD's will likely end Alaska's financial stability and force new taxes, like it or not.

In a recent House confirmation hearing, acting Revenue Commissioner Linda Mahoney admitted the timeline for voter approval of new taxes (November 2022 at the earliest) under the Dunleavy plan likely means we will overdraw the Earnings Reserve Account before we can talk seriously about new revenues.

APU President Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson has been appointed interim head of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Alaska's largest tribal health organization. Valerie is a former DHSS Commissioner and was appointed Lt. Governor at the end of the Walker administration. She's taking a leave of absence from APU.

BUDGET

The Senate Finance Committee will take public testimony on the FY22 operating, mental health and supplemental budget bills on **Wednesday, March 17th and Thursday, March 18th**

All Public Testimony Conducted via Telephone

Juneau (907) 586-9085
Anchorage (907) 563-9085
Elsewhere (844) 586-9085

Written Testimony Will Be Accepted at

finance.committee@akleg.gov

Wednesday

Call In/Sign Up by 10:30am for morning hearing which begins at 9am: Nome, Bethel, Kotzebue, Utqiagvik, Unalaska, Dillingham

Call In/Sign Up by 2:30pm for afternoon hearing which begins at 1pm: Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, & Matanuska Valley

Thursday

Call In/Sign Up by 10:30am for morning hearing which begins at 9am: Southeast, Prince William Sound & Kodiak

Call In/Sign Up by 2:30pm for afternoon hearing which begins at 1pm: Fairbanks, Interior, Copper River Valley & All Other Locations

Budget Hearings for the week of March 15th

Mon, Mar 15th

- 7:45am** Senate Health and Social Services Subcommittee
- 8am** House Education and Early Development Finance Subcommittee-Mt. Edgecumbe
- Noon** House Judiciary Finance Subcommittee-amendments
- 1:30pm** **HFIN** [HB 76](#), Extending Covid Disaster Emergency- public testimony may be limited to 2 minutes

Tues, March 16th

- 8am** House Corrections Finance Subcommittee-healthcare costs
- 9am** House Public Safety Finance Subcommittee-FLS, VPSO, VCCB & SWS Program
- 9am** **SFIN** Spring Revenue Forecast
- 11am** House Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee-Alaska Legal Services Corp.
- 1pm** Senate Education & Early Development Finance Subcommittee
- 1:30pm** **HFIN** Spring Revenue Forecast
- 3pm** House Health and Social Services Subcommittee-Pioneer Homes, Senior & Disability Services, Public Health
- 4pm** House Administration Finance Subcommittee-Risk Management Savings; Covid-19 Impacts & Relief funding

Wed, March 17th

- Noon** House LAW Finance Subcommittee
- 1:30pm** **HFIN** FY21 & FY22 Budget update from the Department of Health and Social Services

Thurs, March 18th

- 8am** House Corrections Finance Subcommittee-Community Residential Centers; Recruitment Retention

- 9am** House Public Safety Finance Subcommittee: Amendments
- 11am** House Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee: Amendments
- 1:30pm** **HFIN** Reverse Sweep
- 3pm** House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee: Behavioral Health and API
- 4pm** House Administration Finance Subcommittee: Procurement Consolidation

Fri, March 12th

- 8am** House Education and Early Development Finance Subcommittee: Covid-19 Relief Funds
- Noon** House LAW Finance Subcommittee

Sat, March 13th

- 8am** House Corrections Finance Subcommittee
- 11am** House Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee
- 3pm** House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee: OCS, Juvenile Justice

BILLS On the Move

Tues, March 16th, 1:30pm SHSS

[SB93](#) Health Insurance; All-Payer Claims Database (APCD) sponsored by the Governor.

[SJR 4](#) Const. Amendment; Abortion/Funding sponsored by Senator Hughes. The bill would add an amendment to Alaska’s constitution: Section 26. Abortion. To protect human life, nothing in this constitution may be construed to secure or protect a right to an abortion or require the State to fund an abortion. If passed the amendment would be placed before the voters at the next general election. *Public testimony will be taken on both bills*

ITEMS OF INTEREST

SJUD will hear about the Legislative Legal Lawsuit on Governor’s Appointees on **Monday, March 15th at 1:30pm**

H Tribal Affairs meets at **8am on Tuesday, March 16th** to hear a presentation on Tribal Contracting, Compacting, and Consultation and on **Thursday, March 18th** to hear a presentation on The Role of Tribal Health Organizations in the state’s Covid-19 response

Thursday, March 18th at 3:30pm SCRA will hear a presentation on Assessing the Present and Looking to the Future: What are the Broadband Gaps in Alaska by Lesil McGuire and Shawn Williams

Confirmation Hearings

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

[Boards and Commissions Appointments](#)

Monday, March 15th, 1:30pm

HJUD will consider Attorney General Treg Taylor

Wednesday, March 17th, 1:30pm

HJUD will consider Gregory Campbell, Justin Doll, Ed Mercer, and Jennifer Winkelman for the Alaska Police Standards Council and Select Committee on Legislative Ethics nominees Dennis "Skip" Cook and Gerald "Jerry" McBeath

Friday, March 19th 1:30pm

SL&C will consider a long list of appointments including Christopher Jaime nominee to the Marijuana Control Board

Saturday, March 20th 1:30pm

SL&C will consider another long list of appointments including nominees to the Board of Nursing Lena Lafferty and Catherine Hample and to the Board of Social Work Examiners Brandon Ercanbrack

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Website: Daily Committee Hearings for March 15-20, 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](#)

Contacting your Legislator/Testifying - The Capitol is closed to the public.

Contact your local Legislative Information Office (LIO) for questions. [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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