

# 2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

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

## Second Edition

~ One week down—Slow Start ~

### HIGHLIGHTS

Seems pretty quiet out here but work is underway to organize the House and break the 20/20 vote logjam so the Session can start rolling.

Lt. Governor Meyer continues to preside over short, often low attendance procedural sessions as we wait. There was another deadlock Thursday when Representative LeBon was nominated once again for temporary Speaker.

Meanwhile, the 14 member Senate R Majority is up and running. Minority D's are used to the odds. Leader Tom Begich said it best "We're starting where we left off". Senate President Micciche says it's high time we solve our fiscal problems. Something has to change this year.

Judiciary Chair Senator Reinbold called for the end of COVID 19 mitigation efforts and presented the controversial [Great Barrington Declaration](#) signed by doctors and leading medical institutions, to support her position.

She was also critical of Commissioner Crum for failing to look at the negative impacts of mitigation measures on the public – "such as the right to peaceably assemble" - and reminded him of his sworn oath of office to uphold the Constitution.

Governor Dunleavy gave us an optimistic State of the State address this week without the usual in person legislative audience, another sign of the times.

This virtual speech called for \$5,000 dividends. [Click here](#) to watch. [Read Governor Dunleavy's full 2021 State of the State address here.](#)

R's liked the speech. D's gave mixed reviews and were especially disappointed that he didn't propose specific, broad based revenue raising measures, in addition to **gambling**.

Senator Shower wants to limit voting by mail systems used in Anchorage, Juneau and other Alaska cities. He says [SB 39](#) is about election reform and non-partisan strengthening of the system. He's neutral on voting by mail.

**SB 39 was heard and held in STA on Thursday.  
Its next hearing is Tuesday, Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> at 3:30pm.**

Others are sounding the alarm!

For example, it would prevent the automatic sending of mail-in ballots by the state and municipalities. Senator Kawasaki, the Minority member on STA, sees it as a voter suppression bill where people will be less likely to get a ballot and less likely to vote.

Shower's bill would also dump the automatic PFD voter registration switching to an Opt-in format instead of the current opt-out. Lt. Governor Meyer also may introduce legislation that would repeal the 2016 Voter Initiative that registers Alaskans to vote when they file for a PFD.

The Anchorage NAACP doesn't like the Shower bill and is calling for his removal as Chair of the Senate State Affairs Committee. Native Peoples Action also has registered big concerns.

On the other hand, Representative Chris Tuck introduced [HB 66](#) to strengthen voter rights with a variety of practical provisions like eliminating the witness signature for absentee ballots, postage paid return envelopes for ballots, and allowing mail-in or absentee voters to fix errors and "cure a ballot".

Senator Bishop introduced [SB 63](#) Temporary Guardianship for Missing Persons which would allow a court to grant a family member or friend – on a temporary and limited basis– access to view bank and phone records if they have reason to believe a loved one has gone missing.

**Keep an eye on all matters *redistricting*** – the every decade process of redrawing the election districts. A big deal because it can change the voting makeup of a district and who is represented in the Legislature.

The Redistricting Board members are Melanie Bahnke of Nome, John Binkley of Fairbanks, Nicole Borrromeo of Anchorage, Bethany Marcum of Anchorage and Budd Simpson of Juneau. Here is general information about the board: [Redistricting Board Fact Sheet](#)

The Redistricting Board met last week and adopted a policy to adhere the Alaska Open Meetings Act and will provide 72 hours of public notice prior to board meetings with 24 hours notice being allowable.

Notices shall be posted to the State of Alaska Public Notice System--[Online Public Notices](#)

National legislation interest: Senator Murkowski co-sponsored a bi-partisan bill to affirm ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, that would provide legal protection to all citizens regardless of gender. It's been in limbo since 1972. All necessary 38 states have ratified, including Alaska in 1972.

Rep. Don Young says he supports the idea, but we need to start over collecting state ratifications since the deadline has come and gone and five states have rescinded their ratification. Nonetheless, the bill has bi-partisan support in both the House and Senate.

According to the CDC in a recent paper, K-12 schools operating in person have seen little transmission of coronavirus, especially when masks and social distancing policies are in place. Indoor athletics are more of a problem.

## **BUDGET ISSUES**

During the Governor's State of the State address he supported a spending cap; a broad based tax, if approved by the voters; and a PFD guarantee for the future. He'll try again to give Alaskans the option of receiving their dividend as a land voucher.

As part of his Path Forward for Alaska, Dunleavy is asking that \$5 billion, a portion of the permanent fund earnings of this past year, be put toward pulling Alaskans out of "a crisis the likes of which this generation has never faced". Calling it a once-in-a-lifetime budget for a once-in-a-lifetime disaster, portion of this relief would provide every eligible Alaskan with \$5,000, equaling the remainder of last year's PFD and the full statutory dividend for 2021.

He'd like to woo the gaming industry to Alaska, push natural resource development, local farming, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and energy production.

He continues to worry about federal overreach and wants \$4 million to fight the fight; said Alaska isn't just a big park.

He lauded his bond package, supported more funding for public homeschooling, improved reading targets through an Office of Reading Instruction and state sponsored summer camps to boost reading, math, and coding skills.

His budget would establish a major crimes unit focused on prosecuting felony sex crimes in Western Alaska; put \$7 million toward ramping up the prosecution of sexual assault; and fully fund each domestic violence and sexual assault victim service program.

The second annual drawing of the PFD Education Raffle was held this week. Department of Revenue officials, along with the sponsor of the bill creating the raffle, Senator Bishop, drew four winners from the 9,833 entries.

### **The winners are:**

1<sup>st</sup> place: Abraham Horpestad

2<sup>nd</sup> place: Rory Stark

3<sup>rd</sup> place: Mark Davis

4<sup>th</sup> place: Teresa Paukan

### **Budget Hearings for the week of February 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Mon, Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 9am, SFIN** FY22 Governor's Budget Overview by OMB Director, Neil Steininger  
Legislative Finance FY22 Overview by Alexei Painter,  
Leg Fin Director

**Tues, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9am, SFIN** Savings Accounts & Budget Reserves, Pam Leary, Treasury Director  
State Debt & Investment Funds Update, Deven Mitchell, Debt  
Manager

**Tues, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3:30pm, SSTA [SB 25](#)**, State Government: Finances; Website sponsored by Sen. Wielechowski requiring the state to establish an easy to use and understand website providing information on state government financial transactions.

**Wed, Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9am, SFIN** [SB50](#), Capital Budget Overview by OMB Director, Neil Steininger

**Thurs, Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 3:30pm, SSTA [SB53](#)** Permanent Fund; Advisory Vote sponsored by the Governor  
The bill provides that five percent of the average market value (POMV) of the permanent fund would be eligible for annual appropriation by the legislature subject to the limitation that an appropriation may not exceed the balance in the earnings reserve account. It would further provide that of the amount available for appropriation, fifty percent of the amount would be available for permanent fund dividends and the remaining fifty percent would be available for appropriation to the general fund.

SB 53 also provides for a special statewide election be held to take an advisory vote of qualified voters on whether the statutory changes accomplished by this bill should continue to be the state's law regarding spending from the permanent fund.

[SJR5](#) Constitutional Amendment: Appropriation Limit; Budget Reserve sponsored by the Governor  
The amendment would change the baseline for the constitutional appropriation limit so that appropriations for a fiscal year would not exceed the average of the appropriations for the previous three years plus the cumulative percent change in inflation or population, whichever is greater, over the previous three year period.

The amendment would exempt from the spending limit appropriations to state savings accounts, the permanent fund, permanent fund dividend payments, appropriations of bond proceeds and the principal and interest on those bonds, and appropriations of money from a non-state source. It would change the budget reserve fund so that it can only be used as a funding source if the amount in the general fund for a given year, is less than the appropriation limit. The budget reserve would be available for no other purpose.

[SJR6](#) Constitutional Amendment: Permanent Funds and PFD sponsored by the Governor  
The proposed amendment would establish a percent-of-market-value (POMV) rule to limit annual expenditures from the permanent fund and establish the permanent fund dividend (PFD) in the Alaska Constitution. The resolution would also require that a portion of funds withdrawn be used for a dividend and require that any future change to the dividend program be approved by the voters.

[SJR 7](#) Constitutional Amendment: State Tax; Voter Approval sponsored by the Governor  
The proposed amendment would provide that any law establishing a state tax shall not take effect absent a vote of the majority of the voters of the state. The amendment also would require that any voter initiative establishing a state tax would not take effect unless approved by the legislature.

**Fri, Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, 9am, SFIN** **PRS/TRS Update**, Ajay Desai, Director of Retirement & Benefits;  
Jim Puckett, Deputy Director; Emily Ricci, Chief Health Policy  
Administrator; Kevin Worley, Chief Financial Officer

## **BILLS**

**Tues, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1:30pm, SHSS**

[SB 56](#) Extending Covid-19 Disaster Emergency sponsored by the Governor. This bill would extend the public health disaster emergency period to September 30, 2021, or until the DHSS commissioner certifies to the governor that there is no longer an outbreak of COVID-19 or an imminent threat of an outbreak in the State of Alaska, whichever is earlier.

**Public testimony will be accepted**

**Tues, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3:30pm, SSTA** during the same hearing for SB25 above, STA will hear [SB 43](#) Elections, Voting, Campaign Finance sponsored by Sen. Hughes and [SB 39](#) Ballot/Custody; Tampering; Voter Registration; Mail sponsored by Sen. Shower.

**Fri, Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, 9am, SEDC** [SB 19](#) Extend Special Education Service Agency sponsored by Sen. Stevens would extend the agency through June 30, 2028.

## **GOVERNOR'S CORNER**

Our newly appointed AG, Ed Sniffen who replaced Kevin Clarkson, has resigned for personal reasons prompted by allegations of sexual misconduct with a 17-year-old girl three decades ago.

The governor appointed Deputy AG Treg Taylor as Mr. Sniffen's replacement. Right before working for the AG's office, Taylor was an attorney for ASRC (Arctic Slope Regional Corporation) Energy Services. Click here for the announcement: [Dunleavy Names Treg Taylor AG](#)

The Governor appointed former State Senator Ralph Seekins of Fairbanks and reappointed Dale Anderson to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. They will serve through February 2029.

## **ITEMS OF INTEREST**

**Mon, Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 9am, SEDC** Outstanding & Emerging Issues in K-12 Education"  
by Dr. Lisa Parady, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School  
Administrators, Norm Wooten, Director of Advocacy, Association of  
Alaska School Boards & Tom Klaamyer, President, National Education  
Association

**Mon, Wed, Fri 1:30pm, SJUD** Disaster Declarations, Extensions-Relating to Covid presentation  
by DHSS on Monday *Public testimony will be accepted on Friday*

**Wed, Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9am, SEDC** Update on the University of Alaska System by Interim UA President,  
Pat Pitney

### **Confirmation Hearings**

**Thurs, Feb 4<sup>th</sup>, 9am SFIN** Commissioner of Revenue, Lucinda Mahoney

## **WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS**

### **Check Calendar Daily - Bills Can Be Rescheduled at Sponsor's/Chair's Request**

**Website**-Daily Committee Hearings for February 1-5, 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 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](#)

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

**~ End of Report ~**

**Contact:** Caren Robinson ([carenr@gci.net](mailto:carenr@gci.net))