

# 2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

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

## Seventh Edition

*~ House Me Too moment;  
Senate busy closing subcommittee budgets;  
more of the past passes ~*

### HIGHLIGHTS

Legislators, staff, and others are getting their shots. The Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium is offering the vaccine to the 450 capital workers, according to the Executive Director of the Legislative Affairs Agency.

Interesting factoid: Populous Anchorage is starting to relax its COVID rules due to better numbers, while small population, isolated Petersburg has become a hot spot, with the 4th highest daily case average in the nation.

The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation said recently that almost 23,000 Alaskans have applied for rental and utility assistance through a program to provide relief during the pandemic. They requested an average of \$12,284 to catch up on rental payments and cover future needs.

COVID didn't stop the House last week but a new controversy added to their stress. A Representative is in hot water following a sexist joke he made on the floor to celebrate Rep. Rasmussen's birthday. He apologized, which was graciously accepted by Rep. Rasmussen who wanted to move on.

Not so fast. On Wednesday, floor action ground to a halt after Rep. Vance (R – Homer) moved a Sense of the House to censure his comment. Friday, the House adopted the motion by unanimous consent after some discussion.

Kelly Merrick is paying the price with Eagle River Republicans for her independent ways. Merrick was the 21st vote for Speaker Stutes that ended the multi week House deadlock. She's been censured already and next steps are under review, including a recall campaign. They claim she handed the House to the D's.

But most Alaskan's have praised her courageous action to force a resolution so the House could get to work after a 30-day stall. She is now Co-Chair of the important house finance committee.

House HSS took public testimony on EO 119 – the executive order implementing the HSS Department split. TCC (Tanana Chiefs Conference) and others didn't like it. Several mentioned the striking fact that a large and disproportionate percentage of native children are in foster care. Rep. Spohnholz also was critical and wondered if hiring more bureaucrats would really help front line workers, where it matters.

A disapproval resolution has been introduced, HSCR 1, and will be heard in **HHSS on Tuesday, the 9<sup>th</sup> at 3pm**. The resolution, Disapproving Executive Order 119, must be passed by March 19<sup>th</sup> or the Executive Order takes effect on March 20th.

Veteran Finance Member Bert Stedman warned recently that time is running out. No matter how hard we've tried to reduce spending over the years we always seem to spend about \$4 billion. The longer it takes us to get to a sustainable budget the smaller the dividend, he said. Legislative Finance Director Alexi Painter agreed.

The Alaska Reads Act cleared the Senate but not the House last year due to the Coronavirus interruptions. The effort between Senate Minority Leader Begich and Governor Dunleavy is being tried again this year with [SB 8](#) Pre-K; Elem Ed Programs/Funding; Reading. The bill addresses lagging scores and targets reading proficiency by 3rd grade.

As we understand, 60% of students tested below or far below proficiency in English and language arts during 2018-2019. The bill would support district efforts to set up voluntary pre-K and reading programs.

Alaska's new voting system, approved by the voters last November as the Better Elections Initiative, is in the works but we won't see ranked-choice voting until the General Election in November 2022, according to a recent news release by the Division of Elections. The release noted it is an extremely complicated re-do and that voters will be involved in the process.

Very sad, two more former Legislators have passed. Rep. Pat Carney (D, Wasilla) died recently. He was 92. He served from 1979-1982 and from 1991-1994. Pat was a dairy farmer and president of the Wasilla PTA. Flags flew at half-staff on March 5th in his honor.

John Sackett (R, Galena) died at age 76. Born in a hunting camp along the Huslia River, at 21 Sackett became the youngest person ever elected to the Alaska Legislature. He served in the House from 1967- 1970 and in the Senate from 1973-1986. He was instrumental in Alaska's first daycare funding.

The rural Athabaskan leader, a chief and shaman, had a soft soul but imperious persona that commanded respect.

In Sackett's own words noted on the UAF website:

*"In order to serve, you must be knowledgeable, trustworthy, fair and honorable."*

Flags will fly at half-staff on Monday March 8th in his honor.

## **BUDGET**

### **Budget Hearings for the week of March 8th**

#### **Mon, Mar 8<sup>th</sup>**

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>7:45am</b> | Senate Health and Social Services Subcommittee- Office of Children's Services; Division of Juvenile Justice; and Pioneer Homes will be reviewed |
| <b>8am</b>    | House Education and Early Development Finance Subcommittee  |
| <b>Noon</b>   | House Judiciary Finance Subcommittee  |
| <b>1:30pm</b> | <b>HFIN</b> <a href="#">HB 69</a> Operating Budget; <a href="#">HB 71</a> Mental Health Budget  |
| <b>6pm</b>    | House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee   |

**Tues, March 9<sup>th</sup>**

- 8am** House Corrections Finance Subcommittee
- 9am** House Public Safety Finance Subcommittee
- 11am** House Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee
- 1pm** Senate Education & Early Development Finance Subcommittee
- 1:30pm** **HFIN** [HB 69](#) Operating Budget; [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 4pm** House Administration Finance Subcommittee-Office of Public Advocacy

**Wed, March 10<sup>th</sup>**

- 8am** House Education and Early Development Finance Subcommittee
- Noon** House LAW Finance Subcommittee
- 1:30pm** **HJUD** [HB 57](#) Funds Subject to CBR Sweep Provision

**Thurs, March 11<sup>th</sup>**

- 8am** House Corrections Finance Subcommittee
- 9am** House Public Safety Finance Subcommittee: VPSO, VCCB
- 11am** House Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee
- 1pm** Senate Education & Early Development Finance Subcommittee  
**HFIN** [HB 68](#) Supplemental Budget; [HB 84](#) Reappropriation Budget
- 3pm** House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee
- 4pm** House Administration Finance Subcommittee

**Fri, March 12<sup>th</sup>**

- 7:45am** Senate Health and Social Services Subcommittee-Closeout
- 8am** House Education and Early Development Finance Subcommittee
- Noon** House LAW Finance Subcommittee

**Sat, March 13<sup>th</sup>**

- 3pm** House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee

**BILLS On the Move**

**Tues, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 3pm HHSS**

[HB 76](#) Extending COVID-19 Disaster Emergency

[HSCR 1](#) Disapproving Executive Order 119 (splitting DHSS into two departments)

The legal memo regarding EO119 from the Division of Legal and Research Services within the Legislative Affairs Agency can be found here: [Legality of EO 119](#)

*Public testimony will be taken on both bills*

**Wed, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 9am SEDC**

[SB 80](#) Public Schools; Mental Health Education sponsored by Sen. Gray-Jackson. The bill amends the existing health education curriculum statute to include mental health curriculum in all K-12 health classrooms.

**Wed, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm SL&C**

[SB 9](#) Alcohol Beverage Control; Alcohol Reg

*Public testimony will be taken*

**Thurs, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm SHSS**

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

*Public testimony will be taken*

**Thurs, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 3:30pm SSTA**

[SB 83](#) Elections; Voting; Ballot Reqs

[SB 7](#) State Trooper Policies; Public Access sponsored by Sen. Gray-Jackson. The bill would require the Department of Public Safety to publish on their website the department's current policies and procedures related to the conduct of peace officers employed or regulated by the department.

*Public testimony will be taken on both bills*

**GOVERNOR'S CORNER**

Glen Klinkhart is the new permanent head of the Alaska Alcohol and Marijuana Control Office. He served as the interim boss since November 2019 and is a former police officer.

Note: The Governor chose not to reappoint several members of board that oversee the agency.

Political blogger Jeff Landfield cut a \$65,000 deal with the Governor's office settling Mr. Landfield's successful lawsuit (appealed to the 9th Circuit) over his exclusion from the Governor's press conferences.

No admissions by either side but still a victory for independents. He now has equal access.

Senator Reinbold lashed out at the Governor's letter that condemned her misinformation efforts and her criticism of the Administration's COVID management and policies. She called his statements "outlandish", an attempt to intimidate and silence critics.

Dunleavy is not retracting, the letter stands.

**ITEMS OF INTEREST**

SFIN will consider **Executive Order 119-DHSS Reorganization** on **Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup> at 9am** hearing from DHSS and LAW

Here is a FAQ on the order from the Governor's Office: [DHSS Reorganization](#)

**Friday, March 12<sup>th</sup> a 9am**, SFIN will hear a presentation on the Centralized Services Initiative from OMB and the Depts. Of Administration and Transportation

**SJUD** will hear about the Legislative Legal Lawsuit on Governor's Appointees on **Friday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm**

### **Confirmation Hearings**

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

[Boards and Commissions Appointments](#)

**Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 9am**

SFIN will consider Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees nominees Rhonda Boyles; Brent Fisher; Annette Gwalthney-Jones; and Anita Halterman

**Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm**

HJUD will consider Board of Governors of the Alaska Bar nominees Rick Castillo and William Granger

**Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm**

SHSS will consider State Medical Board nominee Steve Parker

**Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm**

SHSS will consider State Medical Board nominee Sarah Bigelow Hood

**Friday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 3:15pm**

HL&C will consider Board of Nursing Catherine Hample

### **WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS**

**Website:** Daily Committee Hearings for March 8-13, 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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