

The Legislative Process Begins....

The Alaska Legislature gavelled in on Tuesday, January 17th. Both the House and the Senate have organized and announced majority and minority membership.

What to know this week

This week saw two meetings of interest: On Tuesday, the Alaskans for Better Elections along with data from Sightline (an independent research agency) on the 2022 elections were presented to the Senate State Affairs committee. Watch it [here](#). There is some really good research information from Sightline on how RCV has increased competitiveness and actually made our elections look more like our voter preferences (thus making it more democratic - not less).

And, on Thursday the 26th, there was a [2022 elections recap](#) by the Division of Elections, including the topic on the challenge for rural voting. Michaela Thompson, Acting Division of Elections Director, reported on rejected mail-in and absentee ballots in 2022. Senators asked about the use of drop-boxes in the June Special Primary, and if they would be an alternative to Election Day polling places where there were difficulties finding poll workers. Thompson indicated that the drop boxes used in June were on loan from the Municipality of Anchorage. The state currently owns none. In regard to a ballot cure process, Chairman Kawaski indicated that the committee would be taking it up in the future. Michelle Macaur Sparck of Get Out the Native Vote, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, offered testimony about the challenges of running elections in remote locations. The problems with USPS delivery of equipment to villages and completed ballots to Juneau was also discussed.

All of the legislation we're tracking in the House has been referred first to the House State Affairs Committee. They didn't meet this week, so no updates as of this time. See the Calendar below for upcoming meetings.

The Lt. Governor has certified a petition from a group named "Alaskans for Honest Elections" who want to repeal Ranked Choice voting. And Kelly Tshibaka has created a group named "Preserve Democracy" also to repeal Ranked Choice voting as well. Watch for these.

Who's Who:

Welcome the new legislators to Juneau. Here are links to the [AKLEG Senate page](#) and the [AKLEG House page](#) where you can find **their contact information**, see their pictures and read their bios.

Senate:

The majority: Speaker: Sen. Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak) and majority leader Sen. Cathy Giessel (R-Anchorage). The Senate organized early and they are moving quickly. They have started weekly Press briefings as well. That may bring better transparency to the activities. All of the members except the three listed below are in the majority.

The remaining three: Sens. Mike Shower, (R-Wasilla); Robb Myers, (R-North Pole); and Shelley Hughes, (R-Palmer). Legislative rules don't recognize a minority caucus smaller than five members, so these three will not be guaranteed any seats on any committees, and there is no minority leader. As Sen. Shower has the majority of the pre-filed bills, and as he has no position on the majority, it is unclear as to whether we will need to focus on any of his bills at this time. We'll let you know. However, elections looks like it is going to be a hot topic anyway given the focus this week in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

Priorities: The majority outlined their priorities: Education, Retirement pension plan, how to deal with the PFD, and a focus on state resources (oil, mining, fisheries). One key is to not overdraw the PFD, the other is to do this without new taxes. The proposal from Gov. Dunleavy on carbon sequestration is interesting, and they will be looking at that. Sen. Kawasaki does have two bills (SB17-Campaign Contributions and SB19-Elections/Ballots), so those may move forward. Sen. Stevens has SB29-Civics Education which may also get hearings.

Here are the Senate's committee assignments:

- Community & Regional Affairs - Sen. Dunbar, Chair (Olson, Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, Giessel)
- Education - Sen. Lōki Tobin, Chair (Stevens, Bjorkman, Kiehl, Gray-Jackson)
- Finance - Sens. Lyman Hoffman, Bert Stedman, Donny Oson, co-Chairs (Bishop, Merrick, Kiehl, Wilson)
- Health & Social Services - Sen. David Wilson, Chair (Kaufman, Tobin, Dunbar, Giessel)
- Judiciary - Sen. Matt Claman, Chair (Kiehl, Kaufman, Giessel, Olson)
- Labor & Commerce - Sen. Jesse Bjorkman, Chair (Bishop, Gray-Jackson, Merrick, Dunbar)
- Resources - Sen. Click Bishop, Chair (Giessel, Wielechowski, Kawasaki, Kaufman, Dunbar, Claman)
- Rules - Sen. Bill Wielechowski, Chair (Stedman, Stevens, Giessel, Hoffman)
- State Affairs - Sen. Scott Kawasaki, Chair (Claman, Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Merrick)
- Transportation - Sen. James Kaufman, Chair (Wilson, Tobin, Kiehl, Myers)
- Legislative Budget & Audit (Joint w/House) - Sen. Bert Stedman, Vice Chair (Wielechowski, Hoffman, Kaufman, Kawasaki, Bishop)

House:

The majority: The majority elected Rep. Cathy Tilton, R-Wasilla as speaker. Rep. Dan Saddler R-Eagle River is the Majority leader. This is a Republican-led majority, with the 4 “Bush Caucus” representatives - Reps. Edgmon (I-Dillingham), Foster (D-Nome), Patkotak (NA-Barrow), and McCormick (D-Bethel - joining making the total 23. Reps Edgmon and Foster are co-Chairs of Finance, so that is clear what they were looking for.

The minority: The minority leader is Rep. Calvin Schrage (NA-Anchorage). The minority is 15 members primarily Democratic and includes Rep. Ortiz (I-Ketchikan) who was previously in the majority. The minority has said their priorities include education funding, teacher retention, and funding state services at a “sufficient” level.

The rest: Rep. Eastman (R-Wasilla) is in a class alone, and Rep. Louise Stutes (R-Kodiak) has said she would like to join the majority but is not anywhere at this time, although she was assigned to the Transportation Committee.

Priorities: The majority has said that their priorities are “fiscal issues” but they haven’t quite described what that means. Rep. Vance has been quoted saying that she is interested in repealing ranked choice voting, as well as legislation relating to “election security.” Rep. Rauscher and Rep. Vance are both in the majority, and their bills are likely to be heard in committee. We’ll be watching these. Although Rep. Schrage is in the minority, he also has a bill (SB37) related to Elections so he may get a hearing.

Here are the House’s committee assignments:

- Community & Regional Affairs - Rep. McCormick, Chair (McCabe (Vice Chair), McKay, Patkotak, Ruffridge, Himschoot, Mears)
- Education - Reps. Allard and Ruffridge, co-Chair (Prax, McCormick, McKay, Himschoot, Story)
- Finance - Reps. Edgmon, Foster, D.Johnson, co-Chairs (Coulombe, Cronk, Stapp, Tomaszewski, Galvin, Hannan, Josephson, Ortiz)
- Health & Social Services - Rep. Mike Prax, Chair (McCormick, Ruffridge, Saddler, Sumner, Fields, Mina)
- Judiciary - Rep. Sarah Vance, Chair (Allard (Vice Chair), Carpenter, C.Johnson, Eastman, Gray, Groh)
- Labor & Commerce - Rep. Jesse Sumner, Chair (Prax, Ruffridge, Saddler, Wright, Carrick, Fields)
- Resources - Rep. Tom McKay, Chair (McCabe, Patkotak, Rauscher, Saddler, Wright, Armstrong, Mears, Dibert)
- Rules - Rep. Craig Johnson, Chair (Tilton, Allard, Sumner, Shaw, Fields, Schrage)
- State Affairs - Rep. Laddie Shaw, Chair (Wright (Vice Chair), Carpenter, C.Johnson, Allard, Armstrong, Story)
- Transportation - Rep. Kevin McCabe, Chair (C.Johnson, McKay, Vance, Stutes, Mina, Gray)
- House Ways & Means - Rep. Ben Carpenter, Chair (Allard, Groh)

To see the bills we are tracking and where they are in the process, check the details on [the VotingRightsAlaska.org Legislation page](http://VotingRightsAlaska.org).

Governor's Office:

At the start of the session, the Governor made the rounds at the Legislature. He seems to be signalling a more collaborative working relationship with the Legislature this time. He has proposed raising revenue thru carbon sequestration. In his State of the State message, he focused on the carbon proposal, and he stated support for the families of Alaska in the "Healthy Families Initiative." It is unclear how he proposes to fund this, and if it goes far enough to help create jobs to keep people in state. For Commissioner of Corrections, Dunleavy has appointed Jen Winkelman as Commissioner-designee pending legislative confirmation.

Judicial System:

Nothing to report this week..

Legislative Calendar, Events and Meetings

On Jan. 30th at 3:30 pm, a meeting by the [Senate Education Committee](#) with Dillingham City School District Superintendent presenting, along with **public testimony** on the issue of public education funding in Alaska.

On Feb. 1st at 3:30 pm, a meeting by the [Senate Education Committee](#): Presentation: Cost Estimates for a Base Student Allocation and **public testimony** on the issue of public education funding in Alaska.

Listen live at akleg.gov or on [Gavel to Gavel](#). *

Meetings last week: On Jan. 27th, a meeting by the [Senate Education Committee](#) with a Presentation Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and a Presentation on Alaska Per Pupil K-12 Spending Analysis.

- April 16th - 90th day of the session
- May 17th - 121st day of the session

Wrap Up

You are encouraged to invite others to take action by sharing this Legislative Newsletter, Action Alerts, and Calendar Events. Expanding the League's impact helps us to Empower Voters and Defend Democracy as a community! We'll keep these links accessible here for you.

- Alaska State Legislature website, akleg.gov
- Alaska State's Gavel to Gavel public affairs TV network, www.ktoo.org/gavel/

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BILL	SHORT TITLE	SPONSOR(s)	COMMITTEE REFERRAL(S)
SB 1	ELECTIONS: BALLOT, VOTING, SECURITY	SEN. SHOWER	State Affairs, Judiciary, Finance
SB 2	REPEAL BALLOT MEASURE 2 VOTING CHGS	SEN. SHOWER	State Affairs, Judiciary, Finance
SB 5	VOTER REGISTRATION	SEN. SHOWER	State Affairs, Judiciary
SB 6	VOTING MACHINES AND VOTE TALLY SYSTEMS	SEN. SHOWER	State Affairs, Judiciary
SB 7	ELECTION INTERFERENCE, FRAUD, MISCONDUCT	SEN. SHOWER	State Affairs, Judiciary

BILL	SHORT TITLE	SPONSOR(s)	COMMITTEE REFERRAL(S)
SB 17	CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS	SEN. KAWASAKI	State Affairs, Judiciary
SB 19	ELECTIONS; BALLOTS	SEN. KAWASAKI	State Affairs, Finance
SB 29	CIVICS EDUCATION; EST AK CIVICS ED COMM	SEN. STEVENS	Education, Finance
SB 31	SELECTION AND REVIEW OF JUDGES	SEN. SHOWER	State Affairs, Judiciary

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HB 1	REPEAL BALLOT MEASURE 2 VOTING CHGS	REP RAUSCHER	State Affairs, Judiciary
HB 4	ELECTIONS: REPEAL BALLOT MEASURE 2	REP VANCE	State Affairs, Judiciary
HB 24	GOV APPOINT BRD OF GOV. OF AK BAR	REP RAUSCHER	State Affairs, Judiciary
HB 34	CONFIRMATION/QUALIFICATIONS OF JUDGES	REP RAUSCHER	State Affairs, Judiciary
HB 36	APOC; REFERENDA/RECALL; CONTRIBUTIONS	REP SCHRAGE	State Affairs, Judiciary
HB 37	ELECTIONS, VOTING, BALLOTS	REP SCHRAGE	State Affairs, Judiciary