

## This week: A focus on education, employee retention and judges

The House and the Senate are deep in Committee meetings. We have heard testimony centered around education in the Senate, a report from the retiring Chief Justice, and more on the State's budget.

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### *What to know this week*

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On January 30th and on February 1st, the Senate Education committee heard many speakers giving testimony in support of an increased BSA (Base Student Allocation). They cited numerous reasons for increasing this allocation: teachers describing large class sizes, teacher salaries which have decreased, no teacher pensions and no ability for teachers to even pay into social security, the affects of inflation on costs including liability insurance, Alaska ranks 49th out of all 50 state in quality of education - this impacts whether families decide to stay in the state, it impacts whether students stay in the state after graduation, it impacts whether we can recruit teachers to the state, and so on.

However, not all testimony was in favor of increases. Some concerns with additional funding was that there isn't a lot of accountability on student outcomes, that "throwing more money" at the problem isn't a good solution, and that the State should cut administrative staff first in order to get more teachers.

The Senate Education Committee has now issued [SB52](#) - an Increase in the Base Student Allocation . This would raise the BSA \$1,000. We'll be adding this bill to our tracking. This would be projected to raise the cost of the budget this year by \$247 million. The Governor's proposed budget included a PFD payment of \$3,860. Lowering the PFD to \$1300 would cover the cost of the increase.

In other news, Rep. Ben Carpenter (R-Nikiski) has hired Donna Arduin (now Donna Kauranen), former budget director for Gov. Dunleavy, to assist him with budget decisions. He is chair of the House Legislative Budget & Audit committee and the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.

## National Issues:



The League of Women Voters turns 103 on February 14th.

**ERA NEWS:** New joint resolutions on the ERA were announced in both the House and Senate this week. Senators Cardin and Murkowski, and Congresswomen Pressley, Bush, Spanberger, Dean, Garcia, and Kamlager-Dove, just introduced joint resolutions to affirm the validity of the Equal Rights Amendment and remove the arbitrary time limit from the preamble.

Please contact [Sen. Murkowski](#), to thank her for her continued support, and contact [Sen. Sullivan](#) to urge him to support this resolution and contact [Rep. Mary Peltola](#) to urge her support in the House.

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## Alaska Legislative Updates

### Who's Who:

The AK Legislature has put out their contact list. You can view it here. One of our Juneau members, Gary Miller has also created a downloadable spreadsheet with contact information, it is posted on [VotingRightsAlaska.org](http://VotingRightsAlaska.org) as well.

### Senate:

**New Legislation:** Since the beginning of the session, the Senate has added 10 new bills, including SB40, SB41 and SB42 by Gov. Dunleavy on the operating, capital, and mental health budgets; and SB48 and SB49 also by Gov. Dunleavy on carbon offsets and how to dispose of them underground.

### House:

**New Legislation:** Since the beginning of the session, the House has added 13 new bills, including HB39, HB40, and HB41 by Gov. Dunleavy on the budget as well as HB49 and HB50 regarding carbon offsets. HB43 was introduced by Rep. Hannan (D-Juneau) prohibiting licensed health care workers from trying to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity; and HB44 by Rep. Story (D-Juneau) for the schools to set up a curriculum to include local traditions and lifestyles.

These are listed just as an FYI, but we will not be specifically tracking any of these new bills in either the House or the Senate.

**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:

The Commissioner of Labor, Tamika Ledbetter, unexpectedly resigned on Jan. 31st; Cathy Munoz (former Juneau legislator) has been appointed acting Commissioner. Corrections Commissioner Jen Winkelman testified on the number of in-custody deaths (18) saying 7 were suicides and the rest were 'natural causes.' She said many people imprisoned were in poor health but that the number is "unfortunate."

## Judicial System:

Alaska Chief Justice Daniel Winfree retired this month. In a [speech to the legislature](#), he cautioned that we need to keep our current system of selecting judges which is outlined in our Alaska State Constitution. The following quote from his speech is worth noting:

"I recognize that some here don't believe in an independent judiciary but rather believe that Alaska's judges should be hand-picked and controlled by politicians so that the judges will render decisions that the politicians want. Our constitutional convention delegates were aware of that view and they expressly rejected it, along with rejecting the notion of elected judges and they did so in favor of the merit selection process we have in Alaska. The delegates wanted politics out of the judicial selection process all the way up to the governor's constitutionally authorized appointment of a judge from the list of the most-qualified applicants provided by the Alaska Judicial Council."

Sen. Mike Shower (R-Wasilla) and Rep. George Rauscher (R-Sutton) have both introduced legislation to change that (SB31 and HB34). Please consider contacting your legislators to ensure that these efforts don't move forward. The Senate may not hear this, but the House might, and it may be part of negotiations during the budget discussion.

## Legislative Calendar, Events and Meetings

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Both the House and the Senate Education Committees will be holding meetings on education related issues next week. All meetings can be found on the [akleg.gov](#) meetings tab. Here are highlights:

**On Monday, Feb. 6th at 8:00 am**, a meeting in the [House Education Committee](#). Presentation: Overview of Programs by Alaska State Council on the Arts and Professional Teaching Practices Commission; and at **1:00 pm**, the [Senate Education Committee](#) has a presentation by the Association of Alaska School Boards Legislative Fly-In by School Board Members and Students From Across Alaska.

**On Wednesday, Feb. 8th at 8:00 am**, a meeting by the [House Education Committee](#): Presentation: Alaska READS Act by the Dept. of Education. **At 3:30 pm**, a meeting by the [Senate Education Committee](#) on the new Senate Bill 52 an increase to the Base Student Allocation including **public testimony**.

**On Friday, Feb. 10th at 8:00 am**, a meeting by the [House Education Committee](#): Presentation: Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; Teacher Recruitment & Retention by the Dept. of Education. **At 3:30 pm**, a meeting by the [Senate Education Committee](#) on the new Senate Bill 52, and SB14 on a RIP for Public Employees/Teachers including **public testimony**.

## Calendar:

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

## Wrap Up

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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](http://akleg.gov)
- Alaska State's Gavel to Gavel public affairs TV network, [www.ktoo.org/gavel/](http://www.ktoo.org/gavel/)

### League of Women Voters of Alaska

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

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

BILL	SHORT TITLE	SPONSOR(s)	COMMITTEE REFERRAL(S)
<a href="#">HB 1</a>	REPEAL BALLOT MEASURE 2 VOTING CHGS	REP RAUSCHER	State Affairs, Judiciary
<a href="#">HB 4</a>	ELECTIONS: REPEAL BALLOT MEASURE 2	REP VANCE	State Affairs, Judiciary
<a href="#">HB 24</a>	GOV APPOINT BRD OF GOV. OF AK BAR	REP RAUSCHER	State Affairs, Judiciary
<a href="#">HB 34</a>	CONFIRMATION/QUALIFICATIONS OF JUDGES	REP RAUSCHER	State Affairs, Judiciary
<a href="#">HB 36</a>	APOC; REFERENDA/RECALL; CONTRIBUTIONS	REP SCHRAGE	State Affairs, Judiciary
<a href="#">HB 37</a>	ELECTIONS, VOTING, BALLOTS	REP SCHRAGE	State Affairs, Judiciary