

Week Ten Legislative Report

March 13th - March 17th 2001

1st Regular Session of the Twenty-Second Alaska Legislature

Introduction:

The State House of Representatives spent most the week on the house floor debating the operating budget. The Senate continued meeting in their respective subcommittee developing their budget plan.

Again this year the Key Campaign brought a sense of reality to the halls of the legislature. Both the House and the Senate held special meeting to hear testimony from families.

Budget:

Departing from tradition, House Democrats offered a focused package of five amendments during this weeks debate of the FY 2002 operating budget. In previous years amendments addressed budget items line by line, usually resulting in dozens of proposals. This year's effort focused on the five key areas Children, Health, Education, Alcohol, and Public Safety.

By the end of the week, the Majority of the House of Representatives approved a ³status quo² state budget, even though Democrats and a few Republicans stated that vital needs were going unmet and that the budgeting process was flawed. Many legislature continue to discuss the need for a long-range fiscal plan to address ongoing budget deficits.

The Majority voted for a \$34.1 million increase in discretionary general fund spending in 2002, the first such increase in six years. The house has proposed a general fund of \$2.24 billion for the fiscal year that begins July 1st.

A draw of \$470 million from the \$3 billion Constitutional Budget Reserve will be needed to balance the general fund. That requires a three-fourth vote of the House, or

30 votes, three more than the number of Republican, and gives the minority some leverage when deals are cut at the end of the session.

House Concurs on Fast-Track Supplemental

The House of Representatives this week agreed to Senate changes in its fast-track supplemental budget bill and gave final legislative approval to a measure providing a quick infusion of funds for time-sensitive needs.

The House voted to concur with Senate changes to **HB 117**, which provides for \$28.1 million to support oil and gas development, redraw election districts, help cover costs of the 2001 Winter Special Olympics, fund primary elections, hire Pioneers Homes nurses.

The supplemental budget includes \$5.7 million in state funding priorities, including:

- * **Arctic Power:** \$1.6 million to help the private lobbying group Arctic Power persuade Congress to allow oil development on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
- * **Kaktovik:** \$250,000 to help the coastal plain's only settlement manage the inquiries, visits and other burdens associated with the growing ANWR debate
- * **North Slope gas line:** \$780,600 to help the state to prepare for eventual construction of pipelines to bring North Slope gas to market
- * **Reapportionment board:** \$608,400 to fund the efforts of the state redistricting board, which must redraw final state election district boundaries by mid-June
- * **Special Olympics:** \$500,000 to help cover the costs incurred to lodge and feed athletes and supporters who came to Alaska for the 2001 World Winter Special Olympics
- * **Alaska Pioneers Homes:** \$100,000 to hire skilled nurses at the Anchorage, Juneau and Sitka Pioneers Homes and avoid critical staff vacancies caused by lower-than-market-level wages for Home nurses
- * **Division of Elections:** \$252,000 to defray costs of last fall's special primary election resulting from a U.S. Supreme Court ruling requiring separate ballots
- * **Suicide prevention:** \$325,000 to fund statewide efforts to prevent suicide

The bill also authorized the state to spend \$14.1 million in federal funds for low-income energy assistance, Medicaid services, fisheries research, a Fairbanks transportation study and other functions. The bill now goes to the governor to sign into law.

Bills on the Move!

SB 133 Public School Exit Exam

The Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee (HESS) passed out **SB 133** sponsored by Senator Green on Friday. **SB 133**, sponsored by HESS, would maintain the intent of the state high school competency exam while fine-tuning the program to better meet the needs of Alaska's students. Under **SB 133**, the exam would continue to be administered, but passing the exam would not be required to receive a high school diploma. In 2004, students would have to pass a revised exam that focuses on essential skills to graduate, and students with disabilities would have options to help them earn a diploma if they are not able to pass the standard exam. **SB 133** moves to the Senate Finance Committee.

Senate Pass Sobriety Awareness Month Resolution

The Alaska House unanimously passed resolution that designates March, 2001 as Sobriety Awareness Month.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 2, sponsored by Senator Ward, was drafted in support of the Alaska Native Federation's Sobriety Movement. Designating March, 2001 as Sobriety Awareness Month increases the public's appreciation for the problems caused by substance abuse and encourages Alaskans who choose sobriety.

Inhalant Abuse HCR 6 Achieves Final Approval

House Concurrent Resolution 6, sponsored by Representative Kapsner, passed the Senate unanimously this morning. **HCR 6** seeks to educate Alaskans about the dangers associated with inhalant abuse.

Senate Resolution Passes Rejecting Canadian Firearm Fees

The Alaska Senate passed a resolution on Thursday registering their objection to new fees for Alaskans transporting firearms through Canada. The resolution was sponsored by Senator Taylor.

HB 36 Enterprise Zone Bill Clears Committee

HB 36, sponsored by Representative Hayes, passed out of the House Special Committee on Economic Development, Trade & Tourism this week. The measure would allow

establishment of Enterprise Zones in low-income areas. The bill moves to the House Community & Regional Affairs committee.

Long Term Care Ombudsman Office transfers to Mental Health Trust

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Office (LTCO), which oversees long-term-care facilities in Alaska, including the state-run Pioneer Homes, has transferred to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. The move is the result of an executive order (SB0112A) issued by Governor Knowles on the first day of the legislative session. The order became effective March 10.

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) within the Department of Administration (DOA) previously oversaw the LTCO. The mission of the LTCO is to investigate, mediate and advocate in instances of abuse or neglect in long-term-care facilities. These facilities include nursing homes, Pioneer Homes, and assisted living facilities throughout the state. Covered individuals include any Alaskan residing in one of these facilities who is over 60 years of age. An estimated 70 percent of those living in such facilities are believed to be trust beneficiaries.

The first duty of the trust authority's board of trustees will be to hire a new ombudsman. The job will be posted later this month through the state's Work Place Alaska program. The position has been vacant since November when the last ombudsman resigned, citing perceived conflicts because DOA oversees the Pioneer Homes and ACoA licenses long-term-care facilities in the state.

SB 91 Anti-Abortion has First Hearing in Senate Hess

SB 91 received its first hearing in the Senate Hess Committee this week.

The bill would not allow Doctors in Alaska to perform abortions unless they have fully informed mothers of the risks and told them the age of the fetus.

The bill would require the state to prepare a pamphlet that would describe abortion procedures and include photographs of unborn babies at two-week intervals. Also the doctors would have to tell patients the estimated age of the fetus before an abortion.

Women would have to certify in writing the information was provided, except in medical emergencies - if the abortion was necessary to prevent death or serious risk to the mother.

Six people testified in **favor** on the bill and six others testified **against** the bill. Due to teleconference technical difficulties a doctor in Kodiak was unable to testify. Senator

Green did not close public testimony and plans to hold another hearing soon.

Action Needed on SB 91:

If you have not already done so, contact your legislator by phone, fax, e-mail as soon as possible and urge them to oppose **SB 91**. Also contact members of the Hess Committee and ask them **Not** to move the bill out of the committee.

Senate HESS Committee members are:

Senator_Lyda_Green@legis.state.ak.us phone: 1-877-465-6601

Senator_Loren_Leman@legis.state.ak.us phone: (907) 465-2095

Senator_Gary_Wilken@legis.state.ak.us phone: (907) 465-3709

Senator_Jerry_Ward@legis.state.ak.us phone: (907) 465-4940 **

Senator_Bettye_Davis@legis.state.ak.us phone: 1-800-770-3822

New Governor Bills:

No new bills of interested.

New Senate Bills:

Bill Promotes VPSO Program

Senator Halford introduced **SB 145** this week that would increase benefits for Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs), and increase probation services in rural Alaska.

SB 145 would also expand the VPSO program to provide supervision services for individuals on probation or parole. As a result of an initiative sponsored by Halford in 1999 and 2000, communities in rural Alaska recently participated in a supervision pilot program based in Dillingham. The acknowledgement by the Departments of Corrections and Public Safety that the pilot program was a success made it clear home-community supervision should be implemented in villages statewide.

SB 145 not only provides an opportunity to improve pay and benefits for our VPSOs, but will also make parole and probation services available in villages. Halford has been joined by Senators Ward , Lincoln, Hoffman , Olson and Austerman in support of this legislation to improve public safety in rural Alaska.

SJR 19 Responds to Hate Crimes, Racism

Senator Lincoln introduced Senate Joint Resolution 19, condemning recent hate crimes perpetrated against Alaska Natives and asking the Legislature to join with the Alaska Federation of Natives in requesting an investigation by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

New House Bills:

Infant Hearing Test Bill Introduced

Representative Joule introduced **HB 173**, which would require newborns and infants to be screened for hearing loss at birth.

HJR 21 Set up Open Meeting Requirement

Representative Croft Introduces House Joint Resolution 21 this week to set Open Meetings Requirement. Concerned with back-room politicking over the Fiscal Year 2002 operating budget, he introduced a resolution that will guarantee that Alaskans can see and hear all the actions of their legislature. The amendment, once passed by the legislature, would be put to a vote of the people. **HJR 21** received referrals to the House Judiciary and Finance committees.

Interesting Note:

Joint Open Caucus on Education Monday:

Seven members of the 10-member Governor's Task Force on Education as

well as Education Commissioner Shirley Holloway will present their findings to Democratic Legislators on Monday, March 19 th at 4 p.m. in the Governor's Conference Room. Anyone invited to attend.

Call 907-465-3842 to arrange to listen via teleconference.

Rally for Women's Health on the Capitol Steps -- JUNEAU

Wednesday, March 21 High Noon

Join women and families from across Alaska Wednesday, March 21 to help highlight women's health care concerns in the Alaska Legislature.

Speakers and sponsors include Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer, Sen. Johnny Ellis, Alaska Native women leaders and cancer survivors.

Please contact Schawna Thoma (465-6704) or Diana Rhoades (465-2906) in Senator Ellis' office to sign up your group as a Sponsor of the Rally.

Committee Meetings

(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE *

Mar 19 Monday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532

*+SCR 7 HEALTH CARE COST REVIEW TASK FORCE TELECONFERENCED

+SB 4 MUNICIPAL PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION TELECONFERENCED

*+SB 137 ALASKA HUMAN RESOURCE INVESTMENT COUNCIL
TELECONFERENCED

+SB 6 MOBILE HOME PARK EVICTION NOTICE TELECONFERENCED

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(S)COMMUNITY & REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE *

Mar 19 Monday 1:30 PM FAHRENKAMP 203

*+SB 1 FOUNDATION FORMULA INCREASE TELECONFERENCED

+SB 59 FEDERAL FUNDS TO MUNICIPALITIES FOR ROADS
TELECONFERENCED

+HB 13 SERVICE AREAS:VOTER APPROVAL/TAX ZONES

TELECONFERENCED
+HB 24 BOROUGH REVENUES FOR TOURISM MARKETING
TELECONFERENCED

(S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 19 Monday 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
+ Education Funding Task Force Presentation TELECONFERENCED
=+SB 86 TEACHER EMPLOYMENT & SUBJECT EXPERTISE
TELECONFERENCED
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(S)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 19 Monday 1:30 PM BELTZ 211
*+SB 85 FAILURE TO REPORT A VIOLENT CRIME TELECONFERENCED
<Above Bill Removed from Agenda>

(S)MINORITY CAUCUS OTHER COMMITTEE *
Mar 19 Monday 4:00 PM GOVERNOR'S CONF RM
Joint Open Caucus with House
Presentation by the Education Task Force

(S)ADMINISTRATION FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *
Mar 20 Tuesday 8:00 AM FAHRENKAMP 203
-- Rescheduled from 3/19/01 --
Review Operating Budget

(S)EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *
Mar 20 Tuesday 8:00 AM TERRY MILLER 104
Education Funding Task Force Presentation

(S)CHILDREN'S CAUCUS OTHER COMMITTEE *
Mar 20 Tuesday 12:00 PM FAHRENKAMP 203
+ Alaska State Troopers: Child Abuse in AK TELECONFERENCED

(S)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 20 Tuesday 3:30 PM BELTZ 211
Overview: Readyng Our Workforce for Progress
Steve Goodrich, President, Center for

Organizational Excellence
*SJR 17 FEDERAL GUN POLICIES
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(S)EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *
Mar 20 Tuesday 3:30 PM TERRY MILLER 104
Child Care Issues

(S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 21 Wednesday 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
+ Building Bridges Campaign Presentation TELECONFERENCED
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(S)RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 21 Wednesday 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
+SB 24 LEGIS APPROVAL OF SEAFOOD/FOOD SAFETY LAB
TELECONFERENCED

(S)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 22 Thursday 3:30 PM BELTZ 211
*SB 127 OPTIONAL BLANKET PRIMARY
*SB 146 MODIFIED BLANKET PRIMARY ELECTION
*SCR 8 POLITICAL PARTIES BLANKET PRIMARY ELECTNS

(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE *
Mar 23 Friday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
HB 103 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET
HB 104 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET
Budget Subcommittee Chairs' Progress Rpts
-- no public testimony --
-- no testimony by invitation --
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled
