

Week Five Legislative Report

February 4th - February 10th 2001

1st Regular Session of the Twenty-Second Alaska Legislature

Introduction:

This week has continued with committee hearings and majority caucuses with little floor action.

The House HESS continued with their lengthy overview DFYS. Committee members , particularly Dyson, Wilson, Coghill and Joule demonstrated a keen understanding of the division's challenges. It was viewed as positive by both the department and the committee members.

The Division has asked the Committee to introduce a bill that would give DFYS the authority to expend funds of foster children age 18 to 21. They would also be able to expend some funds from 14 years on. The act authorizes a new federal initiative at the state level for Transition Services. The emphases on services include, mentoring, life skills development, housing and education. It will be funded by a \$5000,000 fed grant and another 20% of state through in-kind match. The Hess Committee members want to stress community programs particularly faith-based groups. The bill draft is still under discussion and will be introduced either as a Committee bill or by an individual sponsor in a week or two.

Budget:

Finance Committees Unveil Budget Bills

The House and Senate Finance Committee introduced their own versions of the budget bills in each body this week. Working to maintain fiscal discipline and avoid wrangling with the governor over dueling budgets, the House and Senate Finance Committees will use last year's management plan, their last point of agreement , as the basis for writing this year's budget.

UA President Talks to Joint Finance Meeting

University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton told the joint House and Senate Finance committees this week the Legislature's investments have helped the University leverage millions in additional funds, attract and retain more top Alaska students.

SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET REQUESTS SENT TO LEGISLATURE

Governor Knowles has sent two supplemental appropriation bills for fiscal year 2001 to the Legislature, including "fast track" requests for Special Olympics and gas line projects. The bills request \$32.5 million in general funds and \$83 million in federal dollars.

Early supplemental action is needed so state agencies can proceed quickly with intensive permitting preparations in advance of an application for construction of the natural gas pipeline. As an example, the departments of Fish and Game and Environmental Conservation will not be able to conduct a full field season this summer unless they receive the necessary funds in time to hire staff and make other financial commitments. With an appropriation of \$1.96 million in March, the state could assist the overall gas line effort and avoid a full year's delay on the fieldwork necessary to act on permit applications when they are received.

Knowles had proposed in his State of the State Address that the Legislature approve \$500,000 toward the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Anchorage.

Approval of the "fast track" bill in March would ensure timely debt service payments and uninterrupted processing of Medicaid payments.

Last year the Legislature included a \$16.5 million general fund place holder in the budget plan for supplementals but that is not sufficient to cover funding needs when a variety of essential services were either underfunded or have had unanticipated caseload increases. For instance, fire fighting costs account for \$4.8 million of the regular supplemental request, and the Longevity Bonus program requires \$1.1 million more.

In some instances shortfalls in one area can be covered with excess appropriations in related areas. For instance, based on current estimates of general funds needed for the foundation formula, \$1.9 million can be transferred to cover most of the \$2.1 million needed for pupil transportation. Transfers were not available for other formula programs budgeted at the low case scenario such as Medicaid or the Longevity Bonus.

Wherever possible, departments have made internal adjustments to keep within current appropriation levels. Nevertheless, supplemental requests are required when increased costs are beyond an agency's ability to adjust without detrimental effects on basic services. The increased workload in Child in Need of Aid and guardian ad litem cases, for instance, has significantly exceeded even last year's trends. Pioneers' Home revenues

were not sufficient to fund the major share of the emergency heating and ventilation system repairs to the Anchorage home as originally anticipated.

Some of the supplemental requests will allow the state to take advantage of increased federal aid in areas ranging from childcare to special education pass-throughs to local school districts. Where the additional federal funds need to be committed soon (such as for winter home heating) the requests are included in the fast track bill.

Schools Inadequately Funded, Says Task Force

An Education Funding Task Force appointed by Governor Knowles recommends \$42 million more in education spending for the coming year as part of a five-year funding plan to advance the goals the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. In a report release this week the task force urges a 1.5 percent annual increase for public schools over the next four years, for a total of \$100 million. The 11-member task force includes industry and education leaders and is chaired by Ketchikan mayor and former school superintendent Bob Weinstein. The group found that schools have suffered a loss of purchasing power over the past decade.

Bills on the Move:

Senate Supports Military Voting

The Alaska Senate passed a resolution on Monday urging the Department of Defense to rescind a directive that makes voting more difficult for active duty military members and their families.

Senate Wants State to Control Education Funds

The Alaska Senate unanimously passed a resolution on Monday urging Congress to give states greater control over the federal education dollars they receive.

Senate Passes SJR 12 Calling for Elimination of the Marriage Tax

The Senate unanimously passed a resolution on Thursday calling for elimination of the marriage tax penalty. Senate Joint Resolution 12, sponsored by Senator Loren Leman urges Congress to correct the imbalance in the federal tax code that taxes married couples more than unmarried people. According to the Congressional Budget Office, married couples pay an average of \$1,480 more in taxes each year than if they were living together and filing individual returns. This marriage penalty affects 67,000 Alaskans.

Senate Passes SCR 2 Designates March as Sobriety Awareness Month

The Alaska Senate unanimously passed a resolution that designates March, 2001 as Sobriety Awareness month. Senate Concurrent Resolution 2, sponsored by Senator Jerry Ward was drafted in support of the Alaska Native Federation's Sobriety Movement.

Senator Olson Measure SB 58 on the Move

The Senate Labor and Commerce Committee voted unanimously to advance Senate Bill 58, sponsored by Senator Olson, which would add a physician's assistant to the State Medical Board.

There are about 250 physicians assistants providing a wide variety of medical services to Alaskans. They are an important part of Alaska's health care delivery system, accounting for over 50,000 patient-provider contacts per month.

Representative Coghill's HB 48 Privacy Bill Passes House

The House of Representatives today passed HB 48, which frees outdoors men from the legal obligation to submit their Social Security numbers when applying for hunting and fishing licenses.

Representative McGuire HB 100 Honors "Juneteenth Day"

All Alaskans will have a special holiday to commemorate the end of slavery and celebrate the freedom of all Alaskans, under a bill unanimously passed this week by the House of Representatives.

Sponsored by Rep. Lesil McGuire, **HB 100** would establish the third Saturday in June as "Juneteenth Day" in Alaska, an unpaid holiday marking the abolition of slavery in the United States, and highlighting the achievements of African-Americans in the state.

New governor Bills:

Governors HB 107/SB 67 Would Improve Safety for Senior

Governor Knowles **HB 107.SB 67** this week to ensure greater safety for residents of assisted living homes by strengthening the requirements for criminal background checks of assisted living home employees and allowing for state intervention where unsafe conditions exist. The newly proposed legislation would also expand the homes that are covered under the current law from three residents or more, to any home that receives state or federal funds for payment.

In addition to requiring criminal background checks for employees of assisted living homes, **HB 107 / SB 67**, also allows the state to suspend or revoke licenses if an assisted living operator is convicted of criminal offenses. The bill allows the state to immediately suspend a home's license and to petition a court to temporarily administer the home when serious life or safety concerns exist for the residents. An assisted living home can terminate a resident's contract when the resident poses a risk to self, others, or property under the proposed legislation.

New Senate Bills

SB 65 Studies Equal Pay for State Employees

Senator Dave Donley and Senator Robin Taylor introduced legislation that would study whether men and women receive equal pay for equal work in state jobs. Although the State of Alaska has never done a study of pay equity, there is research showing existing wage disparities between the sexes in our state government.

SB 65 requires the Department of Administration to identify instances in which the state is illegally paying women less than men. When these disparities in pay are identified, the state would develop phased strategies to eliminate sex discrimination.

SB 65 was referred first to the Senate State Affairs Committee.

Senator Kelly Bill Gives Kids Chance to Hunt

Senator Pete Kelly introduced a bill that would provide extended hunting seasons so that adults can take children hunting.

New House Bills

Rep. Kapsner Introduces HB 115 Emergency Commitment Bill

Representative Mary Kapsner introduced **HB 115** this week, which amends existing statute to allow physician's assistants and advanced nurse practitioners to commit patients involuntarily into a treatment facility. Currently only a physician can apply for involuntary commitment.

This bill would eliminate the need to transport patients into centrally located hospitals for initial assessment.

Rep. Coghill Introduces HB 112 Anti-abortion Bill

H B 112 (Rep. Coghill) information & services available to pregnant women and other purposes, and ensuring informed consent before an abortion may be performed, except in cases of medical emergency"

The bill received three committee referrals (HESS, Jud, HFC).

Rep. Dyson HB 107 Extends Help to Charter Schools

Existing charter schools would get some breathing room, new charter schools would get a financial boost, under HB 101, introduced by Rep. Fred Dyson.

Interesting Notes:

Legislators Reviewed Election Law

Legislators heard a report from state elections officials on the status of new primary elections laws and the general state of Alaska's electoral system at a joint hearing of the House Judiciary and State Affairs committees this week. Lieutenant Governor Ulmer testified before the hearing herself/

Representative Bettye Davis Honored At Juneau Event

Alaska Democrats honored Senator Bettye Davis, the first African-American elected to Alaska's State Senate, this weekend at a brunch in Juneau. Davis gave an inspiring speech detailing her early days in segregated Louisiana and a battle with a disease that led to blindness and a miraculous recovery through faith and the power of her ABCs.

She reminded Democrats that we need to A, have a healthy, happy Attitude and B, educate ourselves with Brainpower to do what we can to help people and C, have the Courage to stand up for our beliefs. She rallied the troops with her message that like the geese, we need to fly in a V for victory and keep honk, honk, honking at our leaders so they can keep their strength.

Joint Open Caucus on State-Tribal Relations:

Will Mayo, Senior Rural Policy Advisor to Governor Knowles, will address House and Senate Democrats at a Joint Open Caucus on Tuesday, February 13th at 4 p.m. in the Governor's conference room in the Alaska State Capitol. Mayo will discuss State-Tribal relations.

Baby boy Croft born:

Burke Chancy Croft, son of Joanna and Rep. Eric Croft (D-Anchorage), was born Thursday in Anchorage at 12:40 p.m. Burke, Eric and Joanna's second child, weighed in at nine pounds, four ounces.

Action Needed:

Senator Ellis ask citizens to Supports Public Health

Senator Johnny Ellis this week asked for Alaskans' support for Governor Tony Knowles' \$2.3 million Back to Basics budget initiative to improve Alaska's public health system.

"So send your emails and make your calls to your legislators today to support these important budget items. The Republicans' State operating budgets are House Bill 103 and Senate Bill 69.

Health investments included in the Back to Basics initiative include funding for 11 more public health nurses and for a physician, nurses and other staff needed to control and reduce disease outbreaks. Improvements over the past four years include an increase in the immunization rate for children to 80 percent, up from 69 percent four

years ago.

Denali Kidcare is another investment working to improve the health of Alaskans. It has provided basic coverage to 15,000 more children and 2000 more pregnant women in just 19 months.

Another component of the Back to Basics budget is \$350,000 for supplies at the new public health lab on Tudor Road in Anchorage.

Committee Meetings

(H)EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *

Feb 12 Monday 8:30 AM HOUSE FINANCE 519

Early Development and Children's Trust
by Yvonne Chase, Deputy Commissioner

(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 12 Monday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532

SB 52 TERMINATION OF STATE PHYS THERAPY BOARD
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(H)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 12 Monday 1:00 PM BELTZ 211

Joint with House State Affairs Cmte
+ Overview by Dept of Law: Indian Law and TELECONFERENCED
State/Tribal Relations

(H)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 12 Monday 1:00 PM BELTZ 211

+ Joint with House Judiciary Cmte TELECONFERENCED
Overview by Dept of Law: Indian Law and
State/Tribal Relations

(S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 12 Monday 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

+ Overview: Dept of Education and Early TELECONFERENCED
Development (continued from 1/31/01)

+ High School Graduation Qualifying Exam: TELECONFERENCED
Dept of Education and Early Development

(H)LABOR & COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 12 Monday 3:15 PM CAPITOL 17

*+HB 91 ADD PHYSICIAN ASST TO STATE MEDICAL BOARD

=+HB 27 LICENSE HOME INSPECTORS TELECONFERENCED

(H)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 13 Tuesday 8:00 AM CAPITOL 102

*HB 1 MOVE LEGISLATURE TO ANCHORAGE

(H)ADMINISTRATION FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *

Feb 13 Tuesday 10:00 AM CAPITOL 17 , AK Longevity Programs (Pioneers' Homes,
Longevity Bonus)

Div of Senior Services

(H)CHILDREN'S CAUCUS OTHER COMMITTEE *

Feb 13 Tuesday 12:00 PM FAHRENKAMP 203

+ Public Health TELECONFERENCED

(H)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 13 Tuesday 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

+ Overview: AK Commission on Aging TELECONFERENCED

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(S)STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 13 Tuesday 3:30 PM BELTZ 211

*+SB 24 LEGIS APPROVAL OF SEAFOOD/FOOD SAFETY LAB
TELECONFERENCED

*SB 65 PAY EQUITY FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(H)SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION SPECIAL COMMITTEE *

Feb 14 Wednesday 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

*+HB 94 PUPIL COMPETENCY TEST;ANNUAL EDUC. REPORT
TELECONFERENCED

=+HB 43 STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS TELECONFERENCED

Bills previously heard/scheduled

(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 14 Wednesday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
SB 19 CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT/SOC SEC. #
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(H)JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 14 Wednesday 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120
TELECONFERENCED
=+HB 52 COMPACT FOR ADULT OFFENDER SUPERVISION
TELECONFERENCED

(S)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 14 Wednesday 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
+ Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled TELECONFERENCED

(H)LABOR & COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE *

TELECONFERENCED
=+HB 56 MINIMUM WAGE TELECONFERENCED
Bills previously heard/scheduled

(H)HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *

Feb 14 Wednesday 4:00 PM CAPITOL 124

(S)EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *

Feb 15 Thursday 8:00 AM Terry Miller 104
Child Care Assistance, Child Care
Licensing, Child Care Grants, Head Start

(S)FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE *

Feb 15 Thursday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
*SB 80 APPROP: SPECIAL OLYMPICS
*SB 73 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS/AMEND APPROP.
*SB 74 FAST TRACK SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS
Overview: Governor's Supplemental Budget
Annalee McConnell, Director, OMB

(H)ADMINISTRATION FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *

Feb 15 Thursday 10:00 AM CAPITOL 17
Office of Public Advocacy
Public Defender

(H)COURT SYSTEM FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *
Feb 15 Thursday 1:30 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519

(S)LABOR & COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE *
Feb 15 Thursday 1:30 PM BELTZ 211
=SB 38 MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:BREAST/CERVICAL CANCER

(H)HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE *
Feb 15 Thursday 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
Joint with Special Cmte on Education
+ Confirmation Hearings: Board of TELECONFERENCED
Education and Early Development
Professional Teaching Practices Comm
=+HB 41 CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT/SOC SEC. # TELECONFERENCED
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

(H)SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION SPECIAL COMMITTEE *
Feb 15 Thursday 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
+ Joint with House Health, Education & TELECONFERENCED
Social Services Cmte
Confirmation Hearings: Board of
Education and Early Development
Professional Teaching Practices Comm

(H)PUBLIC SAFETY FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE *
Feb 16 Friday 8:15 AM CAPITOL 120
Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual
Assault
Batter's Intervention
Violent Crimes Compensation Board
Victims for Justice
