2020 CAPITOL CURRENTS

31st Alaska State Legislature ~ 2nd Session

First Edition

~ Rep. Wilson announces her resignation;
Sens Hughes, Showers, Reinbold stripped of leadership positions;
Rep. Spohnholz moves to chair Labor and Commerce;
Vote to override Marine Highway and Education vetoes fail ~

HIGHLIGHTS

The Second Session of the 31st Legislature is moving right along. Bills are being heard. Budget override votes already have been cast.

No time to waste as they tackle this year's toothy agenda. The budget, PFD's, and taxes will dominate. The recall lurks in the shadows.

Rep. Wilson announced she was leaving the Legislature during Friday's Floor session to join the Dunleavy administration as a policy adviser in the Department of Health and Social Services. Click here for more info: DHSS Statement on hiring Tammie Wilson

But can she? The appointment may run afoul of Article II Section 5 of the state's constitution, which prohibits legislators from taking state jobs that were created or had a pay increase while they were in office.

Click here and scroll down to Article II Section 5: Alaska Constitution

The Senate stripped Majority Caucus members of Committee Chairmanships (Showers, Reinbold, Hughes) and revised several committees' membership. The fallen Senators claim retaliation for their full dividend votes. President Giessel said the action was taken because caucus rules were broken.

Sens Micciche and Showers were removed from Finance and not replaced leaving the committee with seven members. Sen. Micciche was appointed Resources Chair. See the full list of Senate committee changes here: Senate Committee on Committees Report

Structural changes in the House included moving Rep. Spohnholz to be chair of Labor and Commerce, Rep. Zulkosky will be the sole chair of Health and Social Services with Spohnholz moving to vice-chair. Rep. Johnston will serve as co-chair of Finance and Rep. Ortiz is now vice-chair.

The override votes were taken on two issues: School bond debt payments to cities and $5 million for the Alaska Marine Highway System. Both failed, 37-20.

In Alaska, you need 45 out of 60 votes to overturn a Governor's veto but that may be changing. SJR 14 / HJR 15 sponsored by the Senate Judiciary Committee and Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins

respectively, proposes an amendment to the Constitution changing the number of votes needed to override a veto from ¾ down to 2/3.

On Friday, the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee (LB&A) selected Pat Pitney as the new director of the Division of Legislative Finance. Pitney will replace David Teal, who retired last month after holding the position for 22 years.
Pitney was director of the Office of Management and Budget under Gov. Bill Walker. Prior to that, Pitney was vice chancellor for administrative services at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The Governor's proposed 2021 budget does not call for big spending cuts. He says he wants to work with Alaskans to figure out how best to close the gap between spending and earning.
Click here: Governor introduces FY 21 budget proposals

Out of state prisoners no more. Commissioner Dahlstrom just cancelled the controversial RFP for moving prisoners out of state. She found some in-state options, including a pilot program to house inmates with a year or less to go in a dedicated community center.

The Department of Health and Social Services released a court ordered plan explaining how they will keep mental health patients from being warehoused in emergency rooms and jails cells while they wait for the rare treatment bed. The 30 page document also includes quick fixes, e.g. changes to patient admission prioritization.
Click here for the report: Addressing the Gaps

Legislators participating in the bi-cameral Permanent Fund Working Group created last year made one major recommendation: Don't draw more from the fund than allowed under a law passed two years ago. They didn't address the dividend formula.

A Task Force of legislators, the VPSO Working Group, is suggesting an overhaul of key elements of the state's Village Public Safety Program (VPSO). Bills will be filed soon that would offer 9 short-term ideas for improvements.

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

The governor's office will post press releases and other items of interest here:
https://gov.alaska.gov/

Governor Dunleavy will deliver his second State of the State Address **Monday, January 27th at 7:00pm.**

The Governor appointed Neil Steininger as the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director. Starting in his new position on January 21st, Steininger has held various roles at OMB through the past 5 years, serving as Budget Analyst, Chief Budget Analyst, and most recently as the Administrative Services Director for the Department of Education and Early Development.

Among others, the Governor made appointments to the Board of Pharmacy; Board of Professional Counselors; Board of Psychologist and Psychological Associate Examiners; Alaska

Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Directors; Alaska Pioneers' Home Advisory Board; and the Marijuana Control Board. Click here for the list: Jan 15th Board Appointments

SB 151 / HB 204 known as the Alaska Reads Act, introduced the first day of session, creates a statewide comprehensive K-3 reading policy designed to improve reading outcomes. Click here to read more about the legislation: Alaska Reads Act

BUDGET ISSUES

The FY21 budget totals $4.532 billion Unrestricted General Funds (UGF), $969 million Designated General Funds (DGF), $760.3 million Other State Funds, and $3.9 billion Federal Funding, reflecting a flat budget over FY 20.

The bills are sponsored by the Governor and layout the broad categories and amounts of funding available to spend. Bills are eventually what come to the Governor's desk for signature and/or veto.

HB 205 / SB 152 Operating
HB 206 / SB 153 Mental Health
HB 207 / SB 154 Capital; Supplemental

The budget books contain the nitty gritty details of those broad categories and funding amounts.

OMB Proposed Budgets
Legislative Overview

The Finance Committee in both bodies assigned subcommittees to review each state department's budget requests and to develop recommendations for funding based on those requests. Finance Subcommittees are listed here: Finance Subcommittees

The Finance Committees hold hearings to get the big picture of the state's overall finances and the executive branch departments' intentions. Subcommittees hold hearings to work out the details of the individual departments.

Budget Hearings for the week of January 27th

SFIN at 9:00am on the 27th will meet to discuss Savings Accounts, Budget Reserves & Cash Deficiency with Acting Commissioner Mike Barnhill & Pamela Leary, State Investment Officer **HFIN meets at 1:30pm on the 27th** to discuss the State Debt Summary & Credit by the Department of Revenue.

Tuesday sees both the House Finance Subcommittee (FINSUB) for the Department of Corrections (DOC-**8:00am**) and the Department of Public Safety (DPS-**9:00am**) meeting-VPSOs are on the DPS agenda.

SFIN meets at **9:00am** to hear from OMB Director Steininger and Chief Budget Analyst Brian Fetcher on the Governor's FY 21 Budget and **HFIN** starts budget overviews **at 1:30pm** with the University and the Department of Environmental Conservation budgets.

Also, on **Tuesday at 3:30pm** the House FINSUB for Health and Social Services (HSS) meets for an overview with Commissioner Crum.

Wednesday morning (9:00 am) SFIN hears a FY21 Fiscal Overview from Legislative Finance; HFIN meets at **1:30pm** to review the Mental Health Trust Authority.

Thursday DOC FINSUB meets at **8:00am** and DPS FINSUB meets at **9:00am**. Also, at **9:00am SFIN** will hear from the Mike Abbott, CEO and Mary Jane Michael, Chair of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

HFIN takes a turn hearing about the Savings Funds and Cash Flow Deficiency Plan and reviews the Department of Revenue budget at **1:30pm.**

Friday at 8:00am the FINSUB for the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) meets for a presentation on Residential School Programs and at **1:30pm HFIN** will hear an overview of the Alaska Permanent Fund and an overview of the Judiciary's budget (Alaska Court System).

Saturday at 10:00am the HSS FINSUB will meet for Juvenile Justice and Office of Children's Services overviews.

BILLS

HB 27, Regulation of Flame Retardant Chemicals sponsored by Rep. Tarr, last heard in April 2019 is back before HRES on **Monday the 27th at 1pm**.

Also on Monday, HB 142, Native Organizations TANF Program sponsored by Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins will be heard in HJUD on **Monday at 1:30pm.**

Tuesday at 9:00am SEDC reviews SB 6, Pre-K/Elementary Education Programs; Funding, Reading sponsored by Sen. Begich.

HJR 15, sponsored by Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins is scheduled in **HSTA at 3:00pm on Tuesday** and pending referral in **HJUD on Friday the 31st at 1:30pm.**

SB 136 , State-Tribal Education compact Schools receives its first hearing on **Thursday at 9:00am.**

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Sunday, January 26th at 9:00pm and Wednesday, January 29th at 8:00pm, KTOO will rebroadcast a talk by Dr. John Geyman, Professor emeritus of Family Medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine.

"Common Sense Health Care Reform: Where are we now and what are our options?" will be aired on 360 North and streamed on the internet at the same time: https://www.360north.org/watch/

Wednesday at noon the Foraker Group presents: The 2020 Census & Legislators-Becoming Census Champions & helping to ensure a complete & accurate count in your district (maybe the longest named Lunch & Learn of the 31st Legislature).

Also, on **Wednesday, at 1:30pm, SHSS** will hear from HSS Commissioner Adam Crum giving on overview of the department

Reports available to the Legislature and Public
2019 Annual Report Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Check the committee calendar the day of the scheduled hearing as sometimes a bill is rescheduled at the last minute

Website-Daily Committee Hearings for Jan. 27- February 1, 2020
Weekly Calendar

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

Streaming Video
Live Now

Testifying
Legislative Information Office (LIO) LIO Offices

In Juneau: see the committees hearing list for room numbers

Call-in: available with prior approval from the committee chair

1-855-463-5009 or in Juneau 907-463-5009

~ End of Report ~

Contact: Caren Robinson (carenr@gci.net)