

# 2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32<sup>nd</sup> Alaska State Legislature ~ 1<sup>st</sup> Session

## Fifth Edition

*~ House sort of organizes-Senate rolling right along ~*

### HIGHLIGHTS

At long last, the House officially organized under Rep. Louise Stutes of Kodiak, 22-18. But, in a possible first, the duly elected Speaker still only has 20 votes she can count on - no working majority!

While (R) Rep. Merrick finally joined the multi-partisan coalition, (D) Rep. Tarr left after voting for the new organization. Tarr is the former Resources Co-Chair who caucused with the D's for eight years.

This time she'll be an independent D and said she was uncomfortable with all the power jockeying for leadership roles. Rep. Rasmussen also went maverick, voted for the Stutes team but will be an independent R.

Merrick is now Co-Chair of House Finance, along with Rep. Foster. Former Speaker Edgmon is Rules Chair; Rep. Tuck is Majority Leader; Freshman Rep. Patkotak will run Resources; Health & Social Services will be Co-Chaired by Rep. Zulkosky and newcomer Liz Snyder, Education Co-Chairs will be Drummond and Story. Tilton is the new Minority Leader.

Look here for standing committees' memberships: [Standing Committees](#)

**Chief Justice Joe Bolger** addressed the Legislature for the last time. He plans to retire in June. He said the court system has been "resilient" during the COVID challenge. They've done a good job complying with health requirements and still getting business done. Digital options made a huge difference.

Criminal jury trials have been the biggest problem since face-to-face proceedings are essential to proper justice but generally that hasn't been possible due to courtroom size and travel needs. Starting soon, Judges will have the option to hold jury trials in person.

Justice Bolger also opposed efforts by Senator Mike Shower and others to change the way we select district court and appellate judges. Bolger said our merit based, non-partisan system is the best in the US and there is no good reason to tinker with it. Critics say conservative candidates tend to get the short straw.

Juneau Superior Court **Judge Philip Pallenberg** has ruled for the Legislature and against the Governor. He found that 94 unconfirmed executive branch individuals served illegally between December 16 and January 18 after the legislative deadline for confirmation, including the Revenue Commissioner.

They were legally reappointed January 19. The Legislative Council didn't ask the court to undo actions taken during the co-called recess appointment period. This was a matter of principle regarding the constitutional allocation of power between branches.

## BUDGET ISSUES

### **Budget Hearings for the week of February 22<sup>nd</sup>**

<b>Mon, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>, 7:45am</b>	Senate Health and Social Services Subcommittee
<b>3pm</b>	<i>House</i> Finance hears the Revenue forecast from Dept. of Revenue Commissioner Mahoney and Chief Economist Stickel
<b>4pm</b>	Senate Public Safety Finance Subcommittee will review the VPSO Program; Violent Crimes Compensation Board; Criminal Justice Information Systems; and Statewide Support
<b>5:30pm</b>	Senate Commerce, Community, Economic Development Subcommittee
<b>Tues, Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>, 7:30am</b>	Senate LAW Finance Subcommittee
<b>9am</b>	<b>SFIN</b> OMB update on Deferred Maintenance
<b>12:30pm</b>	Senate Administration Finance Subcommittee
<b>1:30pm</b>	<b>HFIN</b> Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation, CEO Rodell
<b>3:30pm</b>	<b>SSTA</b> <a href="#">SB53</a> Permanent Fund; Advisory Vote <a href="#">SJR6</a> Constitutional Amendment: Permanent Funds and PFD <a href="#">SJR5</a> Constitutional Amendment: Appropriation Limit; Budget Reserve <a href="#">SJR 7</a> Constitutional Amendment: State Tax; Voter Approval
<b>5:15pm</b>	Senate Judiciary Finance Subcommittee
<b>5:30pm</b>	Senate Corrections Finance Subcommittee
<b>Wed, Feb 24<sup>th</sup>, 9am</b>	<b>SFIN</b> Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, CEO Abbott
<b>1:30pm</b>	<b>HFIN</b> Overview Governor's FY22 Budget; 10-year plan, OMB Director Steininger
<b>4pm</b>	Senate Public Safety Finance Subcommittee
<b>Thurs, Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, 1pm</b>	Senate Education & Early Development Finance Subcommittee
<b>1:30pm</b>	<b>HFIN</b> Overview Governor's FY22 Budget Amendments; OMB Director Steininger; FY22 Fiscal Overview, Legislative Finance Director Painter
<b>3:30pm</b>	<b>SSTA</b> <a href="#">SB25</a> State Government Finances; Website
<b>5:30pm</b>	Senate LAW Finance Subcommittee-Civil and Criminal Divisions
<b>Fri, Feb 26<sup>th</sup>, 7:45am</b>	Senate Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee
<b>1:30pm</b>	<b>HFIN</b> <a href="#">HB 76</a> Extending Covid-19 Disaster Emergency

## BILLS On the Move

### **Tues, Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1:30pm SHSS**

[SB 67](#), Nursing; Licensure; Interstate Compact sponsored by the Governor receives its' first hearing with invited testimony only. The bill allows Alaska to adopt the Multistate Nurse Licensure Compact. The Multistate Nurse Licensure Compact would allow Registered and Practical Nurses in any of the 34 participating states to practice in Alaska without being subject to Alaska's licensing process. It would also provide Alaska nurses with a multistate license to practice in the other 34 participating states.

The Compact would establish a commission with rulemaking, enforcement, and financial assessment provisions. Alaska would appoint one person to be the compact administrator within the state. The single-state and multi-state nurse licensing programs would have separate receipt support funding, which means the multistate licensing program will not impact the costs for the single-state licensees.

SB 67 would not affect Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs), Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) or anyone else who wishes to practice under an Alaska-only nursing license.

It will be heard again on **Thursday** and *Public testimony will be taken*

**Wed, Feb 24<sup>th</sup>, 1:30pm SL&C**

[SB 86](#) Temporary Permits and Licenses, sponsored by Senate Labor & Commerce

**Thurs, Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, 1:00pm H Arctic Policy**

[HJR 11](#) Waiver From Passenger Vessel Services Act, sponsored by Rep. McKay is similar to [SJR 9](#) sponsored by Sen. Kiehl. (SJR 9 moved from STRA last week and is now waiting a hearing in SL&C.) HJR 11 only urges Congress to pass legislation that provides a temporary waiver of the Passenger Vessel Services Act to allow cruise ships to sail directly to the state from other United States ports.

**Thurs, Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, 3:30pm SSTA**

[SB 39](#) Ballot/Custody; Tampering; Voter Registration; Mail sponsored by Sen. Shower. This will be the bill's 5<sup>th</sup> hearing-invited testimony only

**GOVERNOR'S CORNER**

In spite of last minute pleas by the health care and business communities, Governor Dunleavy decided not to extend the COVID-19 Disaster Declaration. He said it's time to focus on recovery and issued a memo with "advisories". He called this a new beginning - to mixed reviews.

See the advisories here: [COVID-19 Health Advisories](#)

The Governor said they'd continue to operate as before, including state employee mitigation measures. Health care providers and local governments still worry about possible impacts.

Commissioners will closely examine and decide the fate of some 200 formerly suspended regulations that deal with everything from vaccination authority to telemedicine to curbside booze pickup.

Race against the variants. Thinking ahead, health officials also are worrying about coronavirus variants that are spreading around the globe and hope to speed up Alaska vaccinations. So far, 58% of Alaskans 65 or older have received a COVID 19 vaccine.

Governor Dunleavy told Senator Reinbold in writing that he's had it with her COVID 19 misinformation campaign and is done with the Senate Judiciary Committee. He said Reinbold was unethical and violated her oath of office.

Reinbold, who's been overly critical of the Administration's COVID policies and management, initially said Dunleavy was acting like a disgruntled legislator, not a Governor. Old-timer and former Senate President Gary Stevens said he'd never seen this kind of letter from a Governor.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

HEDC will hear from DEED Commissioner Johnson discussing 2021 student enrollment and Covid-19 Federal Relief funding on **Wednesday at 8:00am**

**Wednesday at Noon**, Legislative Budget and Audit meets to organize, elect a chair and vice chair and hear an overview of the committee process by Legislative Auditor Curtis and Legislative Fiscal Analyst Painter

SHSS will consider **Executive Order 119-DHSS Reorganization** on **Thursday, Feb 25<sup>th</sup> 3pm**  
Here is a FAQ on the order from the Governor's Office: [DHSS Reorganization](#)

SEDC and HEDC will meet jointly at **9am on Friday the 26<sup>th</sup>** to hear a presentation "Emerging Issues from the Field" from the Alaska Council of School Administrators, the Alaska Superintendents Association, the Alaska Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the Alaska Association of School Business Officials and the Alaska Staff Development Network

HL&C will meet at **3:15pm on Friday, the 26<sup>th</sup>**, to hold an informational hearing on Pandemic-related Job Losses and Rebuilding Alaska's Economy

### **Confirmation Hearings**

**Monday, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 1:30pm** SL&C will consider Dana Walukiewicz, Diane Thompson, and John Cox for the Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) Board

**Wednesday, Feb 24<sup>th</sup> 9am** SEDC will consider Jennifer Stafford, Lem Wheelles, Adam Reid, Jamie Burgess for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; and Dale Anderson and Ralph Seekins for the University of Alaska Board of Regents

## WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

**Note to our readers:** *Each day, our legislators don masks and pass through temperature scanning kiosks before they enter their bubble to do our business in what has become a public free zone. Zooms, streams, texts, phones, emails, Gavel-to-Gavel and other work arounds are the best we can do to stay involved. We urge you to participate and make sure they know we're still watching!*

**Website:** Daily Committee Hearings for February 22-26, 2021  
[Weekly Schedule](#)

### **Check Calendar Daily – Bills Can Be Rescheduled at Sponsor's/Chair Request**

**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 Alaska Schedule - KTOO](#)

**Streaming Video** [alaskalegislaturetv](#)

**Contacting your Legislator/Testifying -** The Capitol building is closed to the public during the pandemic. There are no plans for in-person visits or testimony.

Contact your local Legislative Information Office (LIO) to learn how to participate in legislative hearings: [LIO Offices](#)

You also can call using the following numbers.

Tell operator which hearing and bill number you are calling to testify on.

Here's the LIO call-in information for testimony:

If calling from a Juneau phone number: 586-9085

If calling from an Anchorage phone number: 563-9085

If calling from any other number: 844-586-9085

Click here for legislators' email addresses: [Legislator Email Address List](#)

Click here for legislative staff contacts: [Staff List](#)

**~ End of Report ~**

Contact: Caren Robinson ([carenr@gci.net](mailto:carenr@gci.net))