

2021 CAPITOL CURRENTS

32nd Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

Fourteenth Edition

~ *Federal aid taking over the conversation* ~

HIGHLIGHTS

The new federal COVID-19 money is starting to suck the air out of the room - a one plus billion dollar question. While the Governor made the decisions about how to spend the last \$1 billion gift under the CARES ACT, the Legislature wants in on this one.

“We really do have an opportunity to make a generational change in the economy of Alaska” said Senate President Micciche, according to press accounts. As we noted last week, the timing is tight since the final federal spending rules arrive on May 10 with a legislative adjournment date of May 19.

Dunleavy has submitted his plan for the new money. House Finance just proposed one of their own. The teams seem to be cooperating, but will they need more time?

There are three main categories for the federal \$ mix: infrastructure development (water and sewer, broadband, school repairs): aid to businesses who are hurting; and aid to individuals for things like domestic violence shelter support.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate regular operating and mental health budgets are progressing. The Federal money will be added when the time comes. Overall, the differences aren't that significant, as we understand. The House budget should be on the floor next week.

Foundational PFD issues are also getting some attention. There are several ideas in play with statutory and constitutional proposals for the calculation and distribution of Permanent Fund earnings. But none are likely make it this year and the PFD amount once again will be negotiated at the last minute.

The House just passed [HB 169](#) (26-14) that would fund education ahead of the rest of the state budget through 2023. This would avoid teacher and staff layoff notices required by labor contracts that must be sent when the Legislature goes too far into May.

In a last straw moment, the Senate voted 17-1 to remove Senator Lora Reinbold as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. President Micciche said it was all about decorum and mutual respect. Reinbold can have the job back if she starts playing by the rules. They hope so. Senator Holland is her replacement.

Alaska Airlines joined the fray Saturday by banning Senator Reinbold from its flights– pending further review - for continuing to ignore traveler mask rules. The timing could be better since she's now in Southcentral and has to figure out another way to get back to work.

For the first time since March 2020, most Alaska prisons are now open for visits between fully vaccinated prisoners and the public, like family members. Some facilities remain closed due to positive tests.

Vaccine supplies are plentiful, and Alaska will soon have enough of it for every eligible Alaska resident age 16 and over according to Dr. Zink, the state's chief doctor. Still, vaccine rates vary, and they are concerned that vaccine hesitancy may prevent a quick return to normal-ish in some communities.

Reps Carpenter, Vance and Kurka introduced [HB 175](#) COVID-19 Vaccine Rights on the 14th. The bill would prevent businesses and public entities from mandating vaccines as a condition of employment unless required by federal law. It also would ban requiring proof of vaccination to access public areas, services, or benefits. It would not be applicable during a state of emergency.

The Department of Public Safety has given up on their proposal to replace six state run Division of Motor Vehicle offices with private vendors. Rep. Zack Fields had introduced a bill that would block the effort and there has been bi-partisan concern it would increase costs in rural Alaska.

Elon Musk may be coming to the Great Land. As part of a project called "Starlink", SpaceX is considering stations to improve worldwide internet access. Ketchikan, Nome, and Fairbanks are key targets. Their low cost dishes placed around the globe should someday offer high-speed service, even in rural Alaska.

BUDGET

Budget Hearings for the week of April 26th

Mon, April 26th

- 9am** SFIN [SB 128](#) Approp; Special; American Rescue Act Plan
- 1pm** HJUD [HJR1](#) Const. Amend: Permanent Fund; POMV; Earnings
Public testimony will be taken.
- 1:30pm** HFIN [HB 151](#) Unemployment Benefits for Covid-19
Public testimony will be taken.
- 1:30pm** SJUD [SB 53](#) Perm Fund; Advisory Vote
[SJR 6](#) Constitutional Amend; Permanent Fund & PFDs
Public testimony will be taken on both bills.

Tues, April 27th

- 7:45am** S Labor & Workforce Development Budget Subcommittee Closeout
- 9am** HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget
- 9am** SFIN [SB 75](#) Appropriation Limit sponsored by Sen von Imhof, introduced in February, receives its first hearing. With various restrictions and guidelines, the bill sets unrestricted general fund appropriations made for a fiscal year to not exceed \$6,000,000,000 by more than the sum of \$6,000,000,000 multiplied by 75 percent of the cumulative change in inflation and \$6,000,000,000 multiplied by 25 percent of the cumulative change in the estimated population of the state. *Public testimony will be taken.*
- 11:30am** (H) **Ways & Means** the Need for a Fiscal Plan & the Cost of Inaction by Business & Community Members; State Budget Decisions & Impact to Local Governments

1pm Senate Education & Early Development Budget Subcommittee Closeout

1:30pm HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget

Wed, April 28th

9am HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget

1:30pm HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget

1:30pm SJUD [SJR 5](#) Constitutional Amend; Approp. Limit; Budget Reserve
[SJR 7](#) Constitutional Amend; State Tax; Voter Approval
Public testimony will be taken on both bills.

4pm Senate Public Safety Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

Thurs, April 29th

11:30am (H) Ways & Means [HJR 6](#) Constitutional Amend; Approp. Limit Budget Reserve; [HB 141](#) Approp. Limit; Gov Budget

12:30pm Senate Administration Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

1pm Senate Education & Early Development Budget Subcommittee Closeout

1:30pm HFIN [HB 69](#) Operating Budget and [HB 71](#) Mental Health Budget

5:15pm Senate Judiciary Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

5:30pm Senate LAW Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

Fri, April 30th

7:45am Senate Health and Social Services Budget Subcommittee-Closeout

1:30pm SJUD [SJR 6](#) Constitutional Amend; Permanent Fund & PFDs
[SB 53](#) Perm Fund; Advisory Vote

Sat, May 1st

11:30am (H)Ways & Means bills previously heard/scheduled
If introduced and referred, a bill on an education tax on net earnings from self-employment and wages

BILLS On the Move

Mon, April 26th, 8am HEDC

[HB 164](#) Early Ed Programs; Reading; Virtual Ed will **also be heard on Friday**

Mon, April 26th, 1:00pm HRES

[HB 171](#) PFAS use & Remediation; Fire/Water Safety

Mon, April 26th, 1:30pm HFIN

[HB 47](#) Council for Alaska Native Languages

Mon, April 26th, 1:30pm SJUD
[SB 82](#) Elections; Election Investigations

Mon, April 26th, 1:30pm SL&C
[SB 78](#) Health Care Services by Telehealth moved from SHSS on the 21st and receives its first hearing in SL&C

Tues, April 27th, 8am HCRA
[HB 11](#) Defensive Display of Firearms sponsored by Rep. Rauscher was introduced in February and will receive its first hearing in HCRA. It will also be heard on **Thursday the 29th** when ***public testimony will be taken***. The bill defines “defensive display of firearms” and excludes such displays from violations of third degree assault, fourth degree assault, and reckless endangerment.

The definition includes (A) openly wearing, carrying, or possessing a firearm; (B) verbally informing another person of the possession of a firearm; (C) holding a firearm in a position that does not point the firearm directly at another person; (D) displaying a firearm to dissuade a threatening person; and (E) warning another person of the availability of a firearm to dissuade a threat by the other person.

Tues, April 27th, 1:30pm SHSS
[SB 124](#) Mental Health Facilities & Meds sponsored by the Governor and introduced on the 12th is already scheduled to be heard. Look here for the Governor’s transmittal letter, explaining the intent of the bill: [Transmittal Letter](#)

Tues, April 27th, 3pm HHSS
[HB 184](#) Require Tribal Child Welfare Compact sponsored by Rep. Zulkosky was introduced on April 21st, heard on the 22nd and is scheduled today when ***public testimony will be taken***. The bill requires the state to participate in a tribal child welfare compact with Alaska tribes and tribal organizations for the administration of child welfare services by the tribes or tribal organizations.

Tues, April 27th, 3pm HSTA
[HB 5](#) Sexual Assault; Def. of Consent

Wed, April 28th, 9am SEDC
[SB 34](#) State-Tribal Education Compact Schools - ***public testimony will be taken***.

Thurs, April 29th, 3pm HSTA
[HB 66](#) Elections; Voting; Ballots
[HB 39](#) Voter Preregistration for Minors
[HB 25](#) Public Schools; Social/Emotional Learning

Thurs, April 29th, 3:30pm SSTA
[SB 126](#) Repeal 90-day Session Limit sponsored by Sen. Stevens was introduced on April 16th and receives its first hearing. ***Public testimony will be taken***.

Sat, May 1st
HFIN and HSTA both have hearing **scheduled for 10am** listing bills previously heard/scheduled

HHSS has a hearing **scheduled for 3pm** listing bills previously heard/scheduled

BILL Updates

[SB 67](#) Nursing; Licensure; Multi-State Compact **failed to move** from SHSS on Tuesday the 20th

[HB 145](#) Expand Pharmacist Authority **moved** from HHSS on Thursday the 22nd

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

Alaska joined Florida's lawsuit against the CDC over their COVID-19 related restrictions on economically critical cruise ship voyages. The Administration stresses we have proven our ability to assure safety for passengers and crew and are a vaccination leader in the nation with low hospitalization rates. Here's the press release: [Dunleavy Joins Florida Lawsuit](#)

ITEMS OF INTEREST

SEDC will hear a presentation on Projecting Alaska's Educational Needs by the Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development on **Monday, the 26th, at 9am**

Wednesday at Noon, Rep. Zulkosky is sponsoring a presentation: Healthcare Access in Alaska by Jared Kosin, the President and CEO of the Alaska State Hospital & Nursing Home Association; and Winn Davis, Policy Analyst for the Alaska Native Health Board

HTribal Affairs will meet on **Thursday the 29th at 8am** and hear a presentation on Education Compacting in Alaska

Confirmation Hearings

For a list of the Governor's appointees released March 1st click here: [Boards and Commissions Appointments](#)

Wednesday, April 28th, 1pm

HJUD will consider Kristie Babcock for the Alaska Judicial Council

Friday, April 30th, 8am

HL&C will consider Sharon Woodward for the Board of Social Work

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Website: Daily Committee Hearings for April 19-24, 2021: [Weekly Schedule](#)

Gavel to Gavel: Streaming Video [alaskalegislaturet看](#)

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)