



Capitol Report
By Senator Gary Stevens
March 3, 2020

Hello from Juneau. The legislative session is now in its seventh week and we are making progress on the bills that must pass before adjournment. One of these is the supplemental budget bill (HB 234), which passed the House on Wednesday, February 26th and is now in the Senate Finance Committee. As you may know, the supplemental budget covers unexpected shortfalls in state funding between fiscal years.

Supplemental Budget

As it left the House, HB 234 totals \$298.6 million of general funds and an overall total of \$526.2 million of state and federal money. The bill was left unchanged from the governor's original proposal.

The supplemental budget contains:

- \$120 million of state funds and \$143.4 million of federal funds for Medicaid provider payments
- \$110.5 million to pay for wildland firefighting costs incurred last year
- \$8.6 million to restore Adult Public Assistance to ensure payments for low-income Alaskans
- \$8.3 million to restore the Adult Preventive Dental Program
- \$7.1 million for the Alaska Marine Highway System to avoid a reduction in the operating schedule for the spring and summer of this year
- \$6.7 million for the Department of Public Safety to address a shortfall within the Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers due to a lower than expected vacancy rate
- \$6 million to help the Alaska Psychiatric Institute increase its capacity
- \$3 million to address the severe damage caused in Anchorage, Kenai, and Mat-Su by the December 2018 earthquake
- \$150,000 to re-open the District Attorney's Office in Utqiagvik

Operating Budget

Before it heads to a floor vote, the Senate Finance Committee will soon hold public hearings on this year's \$4.45 operating budget bill (HB 205). Please contact the Legislative Information Office (LIO) near you for information on how to offer your input to the Finance Committee.

The Cordova LIO can be reached at (907) 424-5461

The Homer LIO can be reached at (907) 235-7878.

The Kenai LIO can be reached at (907) 283-2030.

The Kodiak LIO can be reached at (907) 486-8116.

Personal Legislation

There are many bills and resolutions currently moving through the legislature, including bills I have sponsored. I anticipate some of these bills to advance from their current committees of referral before the next edition of the *Capitol Report*.

One of these is SB 182. The bill proposes two key policies: aligning state law with federal law in raising the minimum age to buy, sell or possess tobacco and electronic smoking products (ESPs) from age 19 to 21; and including ESPs under the existing wholesale tax structure for other tobacco products. With the goal of keeping e-cigarettes out of the hands of kids, I have received strong support for the bill.

I hope to see SB 30 reach the floor for a vote of the full Senate soon. The bill creates the Middle College Program in Alaska. A type of dual credit system, Middle Colleges are partnerships between school districts and colleges. They offer a focused curriculum, at no cost to pupils, increasing the opportunity of students from all economic backgrounds to earn college credits while still in high school.

Please get in touch with my office or send me an e-mail if you would like more information on my personal legislation.

(Track legislation online at: www.akleg.gov/basis/Home/BillsandLaws/31)

AMHS Working Group

The governor has appointed members to the Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Working Group. The group is charged with giving recommendation on future finances and service levels to the administration.

The group is chaired by retired Coast Guard Admiral Tom Barrett, whose career in Alaska included stops in Kodiak and Juneau. Senate District P representation on the 9-member panel includes Kodiak Representative Louise Stutes, and former Kasilof state senator John Torgerson.

The working report is due by the end of September, with the goal of implementing changes in 2023.

Coronavirsus Resources Available

State health officials are in contact with their counterparts at the local and federal levels as they monitor developments in the coronavirus outbreak. The Department of Health and Social Services has established a webpage to direct you to related resources.

You can find it at: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/Human-Coronavirus.aspx>.

PFD Deadline Approaching

The deadline to apply for this year's Permanent Fund Dividend is Tuesday, March 31st. If you have access to the internet, you will find online filing for the dividend to be quick and easy. The PFD Division's website can be reached at: www.pfd.alaska.gov. If you are applying by mail, I highly recommend you send your application by certified mail and request a return receipt.

Pick.Click.Give.

Several local nonprofit organizations are participating in the Pick.Click.Give. program again this year. The program offers you the opportunity to donate all, or part of your PFD in \$25 increments to the nonprofit organization of your choice.

Pick.Click.Give is run by the Alaska Community Foundation in partnership with the Rasmuson Foundation, the Foraker Group, and the State of Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend Division.

You can get more information on the program online at: <https://www.pickclickgive.org>.

Constituents in the Capitol

It is always nice to spend some time with District P residents during the stops in Juneau. In recent weeks, my office has been visited by local government officials from the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak Island Boroughs, the City of Kodiak, City of Homer, students involved in the 4-H program, close-up students from Port Graham, representatives from aquaculture organizations, health care providers, and social services providers.

As you head this way during session, please give my office a call so we can find a time to visit.

Contact Information

Thanks to all who have contacted me throughout this session. Your thoughts on the issues coming before us in Juneau is invaluable.

E-mail me anytime at: sen.gary.stevens@akleg.gov.

My Capitol office can be reached by phone at 1-800-821-4925, and in Juneau at 465-4925. The fax number is 465-3517.

My mailing address is: Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, 120 4th Street, State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, AK 99801.

Thanks for reading this edition of the Capitol Report. I look forward to sharing more on what's happening in Juneau in future reports.