



Capitol Report
February 3, 2020
by
Senator Gary Stevens

Hello again from Juneau. The Capitol has been extremely active in the early weeks of the legislative session and will continue to be so between now and adjournment this Spring. The legislature's various committees have been meeting regularly, including the Senate Education Committee, which I chair, and the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee, which I have been asked to serve on this year.

Work on the Fiscal Year 2021 budget is also well underway. I have been attending Senate Finance Committee hearings when my schedule allows. During these hearings, members of the administration have been briefing legislators on the governor's proposed \$4.5 billion budget (plus an additional \$2 billion to pay for Permanent Fund Dividends under the statutory formula).

The governor's budget has a deficit of \$1.5 billion, which would be balanced by the Constitutional Budget Reserve (CBR). Legislators in both bodies are wary of spending down the CBR under the governor's plan, as this would leave only \$500 million in the account, jeopardizing our ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

We are very early in the process, but before the budget leaves the legislature it will be thoroughly vetted in both bodies. Alaskans will also be asked to provide their input during the Senate and House Finance Committees' public testimony hearings.

State of the State Address

Among the matters still ahead of us are proposals the governor introduced during his Monday, January 27th State of the State address. One of these new ideas is the creation of a statewide lottery. Another proposal would allow Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) recipients to claim state land in place of dividends. The governor also wants to establish a state inspector general position to investigate programs and services for cost effectiveness and create a working group to explore ways to recruit and retain teachers.

I look forward to hearing more details about the governor's proposals as they work through the legislature. As always, your thoughts on these and any other issues are welcome any time.

PFD Raffle

The drawing in the first-ever PFD Education Raffle was held on Tuesday, January 28th in Juneau. Four Alaskans won prizes and more than \$652,000 was raised for educational opportunities.

The PFD Education Raffle allows Alaskans to donate money from their dividend to public education in \$100 increments per entry. In the first year of its existence, the raffle had 8,698 contributions, totaling \$869,800. As prescribed by law, 50% of this revenue is allocated to supplemental education grants, 25% is allocated to the Education Endowment Fund, and 25% is allocated to the raffle fund. For the raffle drawing, first prize is 8% of the raffle fund; second prize is 4%; third prize is 2%; fourth prize is 1%; and the remaining 85% of the raffle's revenue will grow the fund for future years' prize money.

If you are interested in taking part in the next raffle, you will want to make sure to get your PFD application completed before the Tuesday, March 31st deadline. 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>.

2020 Census

The 2020 United States Census got underway in Toksook Bay, Alaska on Tuesday January 21st, and more counting is ahead. As part of its efforts, the U.S. Census Bureau will ask 10 questions regarding the number of people residing at your address, along with names, genders, ages and the like. It takes roughly 10 minutes to answer the survey, and all information is confidential.

This year's population count will determine Alaska's share of more than \$675 billion in federal funding for the next decade. The census also will be utilized in determining the new boundaries for Alaska's 40 House and 20 Senate districts beginning with the 2022 elections.

You can find out more about the census online at: <https://alaskacounts.org>.

Constituents in the Capitol

It was great visiting with several Senate District P residents during their stops in the Capitol the past few weeks. Included in the list were students from Kachemak Bay's Russian communities, Homer Electric Association and Cordova Electric Cooperative board members and officials, fishing education advocates from Kodiak, and City of Kodiak Mayor Pat Branson.

Give my office a call so we can find a time to get together when you are in Juneau during session. My Capitol office number is 1-800-821-4925.

Other Contact Information

My mailing address is: 120 4th Street, State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, AK 99801.

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Thank you for reading the Capitol Report. Please keep in touch.