



Senator Gary Stevens Capitol Report

February 21, 2020

Greetings from Juneau. We are about a month into the legislative session and a lot is happening at the Capitol. Of course, the budget is still the session's major focus, as is the recent addition of the governor's Fiscal Year '20 supplemental budget bill (SB 174/HB 234). The supplemental budget totals \$507.9 million, with \$262.5 million coming from state general funds and the rest from federal funds.

Supplemental budget bills generally cover unanticipated costs occurring after the fiscal year has begun. Major drivers in this year's supplemental budget are natural disasters, including 2019's summer wildfires, and Medicaid costs. The bill also contains funding for the Alaska Marine Highway System, public safety, mental health programs and elder care services.

Some items of interest in the FY20 supplemental bill include:

- \$110.5 million in State funds to cover expenses following last summer's devastating wildfires in the Southcentral and Interior regions of the state
- \$3 million in State funds for infrastructure repairs from the 2018 Cook Inlet Earthquake
- \$128 million in State funds for Medicaid services
- \$6.7 million in State funds to hire new Alaska State Troopers, Wildlife Troopers, and purchase Trooper equipment
- \$1 million in State funds for the Pioneer Home Payment Assistance Program
- \$6 million in State funds to achieve full capacity at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute
- \$12 million in Marine Highway receipts for the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS)

Discussions on the supplemental budget are underway in the Finance Committees of both legislative bodies. I will continue to attend these hearings as my schedule allows.

Marine Highway System Funding Boost

As it crafts the FY '21 operating budget, the House Finance Committee will consider a finance subcommittee recommendation to boost the AMHS budget by \$18.7 million. This funding should be in-tact when the budget bill is transmitted to the Senate later this session.

In preparation for budget debates in our body, the Senate Finance Committee will be taking an in-depth look at AMHS and its future. I have been asked to join the committee for these critical discussions and will give you an update on our progress in a future edition of the Capitol Report.

A big thanks goes to Representative Louise Stutes of Kodiak for diligently working to keep AMHS's funding in front of her fellow representatives. I believe we will see a strong level of support for ferries in the Senate, and we will fight to keep this money in the budget. There is no reason why we can not find a workable solution to the ferry budget to provide reliable, year-round service in our coastal communities.

District P Constituent Survey

Thank you to those who took our first survey of the year on some of the governor's proposals and district priorities. Initial results for the four questions on the poll are:

- 1. What do you believe should be the Legislature's top priority?** 48% said roads and ferries; 48% said education funding; with 2% supporting larger Permanent Fund Dividends and 2% public safety.
- 2. Do you support or oppose creation of a statewide lottery?** Nearly 59% of respondents are opposed to a statewide lottery, while the remainder are supportive.
- 3. Do you support or oppose the option of receiving state land in lieu of a larger Permanent Fund Dividend?** 64% of respondents oppose the idea, while the rest support the concept.
- 4. What are your primary concerns for our community?** Ferries and schools drew 25% each; 21% identified climate change; 10% Fish and Game; and 7% roads.

The survey's audience was limited to our email list recipients and was meant to get an idea of what constituents think on specific topics. We left out questions regarding broad-based taxes as they will not see serious consideration this year.

REAL ID

Starting October 1, 2020, Alaska residents will need to present a REAL ID compliant license/ID, passport or another acceptable form of identification to board commercial aircraft, access Federal facilities and entering nuclear power plants. Applications for REAL IDs must be made in person at Division of Motor Vehicles offices and bring required documents.

You can find out more about REAL IDs online at: doa.alaska.gov/dmv/akol/ID%20News.htm.

District P Newsmakers

Among the governor's recent appointments to state boards and commissions is Anchor Point's Daniel Weatherly, who has been appointed to the Police Standards Council.

Kasilof's Kerry Nelson has been appointed to the Natural Resources Conservation and Development Board.

Former Kodiak resident Jana Turvey has been appointed to the Alaska Aerospace Corporation Board of Directors.

(If you are interested in serving the state, you can get more information on Alaska's Boards and Commissions online at: <https://gov.alaska.gov/services/boards-and-commissions>)

Congratulations to the Homer High School Hockey Team on winning the Division II State Hockey Championship in Fairbanks earlier this month. It is the hockey program's first state title.

Congratulations to the Kodiak High School Shakesbears and Coach Jared Griffin on the team's stellar performance in the Alaska School Activities Association's Drama, Debate, and Forensics. Competition February 14-16 in Juneau. In only their second year of competition, the Shakesbears captured more first place finishes and had more finalists than any other school to become the 2020 Alaska state champions in Drama and the 2020 Alaska state champions in Forensics.

Constituents in the Capitol

Regrettably, weather and aircraft issues kept me from two planned trips to our communities since the last Capitol Report. However, I did have the opportunity to meet with several constituents during that time, including school board members, educators, farmers, fire chiefs, civic leaders and social service advocates.

Before you head to Juneau this session, please give the Capitol office a call so we can find time to meet.

Don't Miss the PFD Deadline

The 2020 Permanent Fund Dividend application period continues through Tuesday, March 31st. The easiest way to apply is via the PFD Division's website at www.pfd.alaska.gov. If you are applying by mail, please send your application by certified mail and request a return receipt for your records.

Thank you for reading this edition of the Capitol Report. I look forward to sharing more information on the legislature's work in Juneau throughout the session.