



**Special Session Update
by
Senator Gary Stevens**

Hello again. As you may know, the governor has called the legislature into special session to finish work on the Fiscal Year 2020 budget, finalize the amount of this year's Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD), and pass a criminal justice reform bill (HB-49).

HB-49 Close to Passing

On the first day of the special session, May 16th, a joint-conference committee comprised of three senators and three representatives reached a compromise on HB-49. This legislation repeals many of the provisions of 2016's SB-91, a well-intentioned omnibus criminal justice law that ultimately failed to reduce Alaska's crime rates.

HB 49 includes stronger sentences for crimes, particularly drug and sex-related offenses. The law also returns discretion to judges when determining pre-trial conditions for an accused criminal. Another part of the compromise is the establishment of an informal working group of legislators to look at ways of reducing recidivism.

It is expected the negotiated version of HB-49 will easily pass both legislative bodies later this month, and then be transmitted to the governor. Given the governor's strong support for the bill, I anticipate quick action from him.

The Budget and the PFD

It is not certain how quickly we will reach agreement on the budget. The governor's proposed budget cut of \$1.6 billion would dramatically impact nearly every state agency and their operations throughout Alaska. The Senate and House versions of the budget reduce spending, but not to the great extent of the governor's plan.

The major sticking point is the PFD. The governor has requested a PFD of about \$3,000 this year, which will cost \$1.9 billion. The Senate has included this amount in its budget. The House has proposed setting the dividend amount in separate legislation.

This is not an easy issue, as opinions on the PFD are as varied as our state. Lawmakers hear regularly from constituents that they would accept a reduced dividend if it means funding essential services. We also hear frequently from those adamantly opposed to any reductions in the dividend.

The special session can last up to 30 days. It is our goal to reach agreement on the budget issues well before that.

Senate Bill 61 Passed by the Legislature

In a unanimous vote on Wednesday, May 8th, the House passed my bill, SB-61. The bill will allow the Commercial Fishermen's Fund (CFF) to pay the full deductible, up to \$5,000, when a claim for benefits is made to both the CFF and private Protection and Indemnity policy insurance.

The CFF was created in 1951 to provide for the care of sick and disabled fishermen working in Alaska's fishing fleet.

SB 61 goes next to the governor for approval.

Assistance with State Agencies

My staff is available to assist you with matters involving state government throughout the year. Please give us a call if we may be of assistance to you.

The phone number for our Kodiak office is 486-4925.

Our Homer office can be reached at 235-0690.

Call us in the Capitol building toll free at 1-800-821-4925.

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

Thanks to District P's media for the opportunity to update you on special session. I look forward to providing you another update when we conclude our work in Juneau.