

2016 CAPITOL CURRENTS

29th Alaska State Legislature ~ 2nd Session

Pre-session Report

~ Opening bell is Tuesday – January 19, 2016 ~

HIGHLIGHTS

Oil prices continue to plunge! Standard & Poor lowered its rating on Alaska's general obligation debt! The stock markets are roiling over uncertainty in the economy.

The good news is that most legislators seem to agree that an overhaul of the Permanent Fund mechanism is needed to avoid calamity in Alaska.

Besides the discussions on how best to achieve this restructuring, the debate over cutting state government, and a multitude of proposed new taxes will dominate this session.

Meanwhile, prefiled legislation released this past Friday gives us a glimpse into some of the priorities legislators are considering. Among them is a bill to repeal Medicaid expansion if any of four conditions are met at any time in the next five years – expansion would automatically stop.

Watch HB 219 for arguments on this topic and HB 222 that has an impact on the acceptance of Medicaid funding. Another piece of legislation, HB 227, would evaluate the current Medicaid program and its sustainability.

Both the House and Senate have introduced bills (HB 226 and SB 124) to extend the termination date of the Alaska Commission of Aging.

HB 221 relates to protective orders issued by other jurisdictions other than the state.

Another bill of interest is HB 215. This relates to prescribing, dispensing, and administering an investigational drug and providing immunity for persons distributing such products.

HB 236/SB 120 would bar the state or municipalities from penalizing those authorize to perform marriages from refusing to do so.

HB 223 eliminates the 90-day legislative session enacted about ten years ago and reverts back to a 121-day session as spelled out in the Alaska Constitution.

Stay tuned for the second and last pre-file release this coming Friday – January 15th.

On a sad note, former first lady Michael Margaret Stewart Cowper – the former wife of Alaska Governor Steve Cowper - passed away in October of ovarian cancer at the age of 62.

SIGNED LEGISLATION

Relevant legislation signed into law by the governor during the interim:

- SB 71 authorizes trained and certified pharmacists to immunize Alaskans without having to contract with a doctor or nurse practitioner to oversee that program.
- HB 4 reduces the liability of those who acquire and provide automated external defibrillators.
- HB 26 extends the Board of Certified Direct-entry midwives. The bill also requires that Legislative Audit submit an interim report regarding the board's compliance with a June 30, 2014 audit.
- HB 123 created the Marijuana Control Board. It establishes a governing body to oversee and uphold regulations for marijuana production and distribution.
- HB 180 establishes the second Sunday in June as Children's Day in Alaska.
- HB 106 updates the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act to allow the state to collect child support from parents living outside the U.S.
- The Alaska Safe Children's Act (HB 44) became law on July 9th. The bill is a combination of "Erin's Law" and "Bree's Law," and provides child sexual assault and teen dating violence prevention curriculum to elementary schools and high schools across Alaska.

The Alaska Safe Children's Task Force established through this bill has been working on recommendations for a model curriculum on assault prevention topics.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

In June this past year, 160+ Alaskans convened in Fairbanks to begin a series of conversations about the future of our state. The event was opened to the public and the opening session and other select presentations were broadcast by various TV outlets and streamed live on the web.

The outcome of these dialogues is in the form of several recommendations and strategies. The path to long-term fiscal stability includes a "sovereign wealth approach" to provide a stable source of revenue.

This involves an overhaul of Permanent Fund and its mechanism's as referenced at the beginning of this report. The other actions called for include further reduction in government spending, key investments for Alaska's future, and adjusting existing taxes besides the implementation of a modest broad-based tax.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS/INFO

Governor Walker made a host of announcements and appointments during the summer and fall of 2015. These can be found on his website – <http://gov.alaska.gov>

This includes other links germane to the subject at hand.

Highlights of some of these are as follows: Released the special investigative report of wrongdoing in the Alaska National Guard.

Informed the Legislature of his intent to accept additional federal money to expand Medicaid in Alaska. Implementation took place on Sept. 1st.

On July 1st he made appointments to the Marijuana Control Board. Note that the Board finalized the entire set of regulations concerning Marijuana on Nov. 24th.

In mid-August, an administrative review of the Dept. of Corrections was launched to look for ways to improve department policies and ensure inmate safety. Subsequent to that in mid-November, the Governor appointed Walter Monegan III as the interim commissioner of the department replacing Ron Taylor. The review mentioned above was also released.

Early September saw state officials and the Native American Rights Fund announce a settlement of a historic Voting Rights case relating to language assistance for voters with limited proficiency in English.

The Alaska Criminal Justice Commission released its extensive report on justice reinvestment strategies for the state. This included recommendations for the upcoming legislative session.

The governor announced a statewide housing summit that occurred on Jan. 6, 2016 to address Alaska's pressing housing needs. That report is still forthcoming.

The Alaska Supreme Court on January 8th, upheld as constitutional a state requirement that local government help pay for education, reversing a lower court decision. The ruling came in a case filed against the state by the Ketchikan Gateway Borough.

And last, but not least was the historic visit by President Barack Obama to Alaska. Governor Walker accompanied him and his entourage to the state on Air Force One. The President attended a pre-conference to the National Conference on Climate Change.

LEGISLATION IN PLAY

The following bills are still active and in various stages of the legislative process. All bills available on – <http://w3.legis.state.ak.us>

In the Senate

SB 1 / Regulation of Smoking

SB 14 / State Medical Board Appointments; Medical Reviews

SB 74 / Medicaid Reform/PFD/HSAS/ER Use/Studies

SB 80 / Education Standards and Assessments/Federal Funds

SB 89 / Parent Rights: Education; School Absence

SB 98 / Prescription Without Physical Examination

SB 99 / Alcoholic Beverage Control; Alcohol Regulations

SB 102 / Unfunded Education Mandates; Training; Reporting of Child Abuse

SCR 4 / U.S. Countermand Convention Delegates

SJR 3 / Constitutional Amendment: Membership of Judicial Council

SJR 15 / Call for U.S. Countermand Convention

HB 75 / Regulation of Marijuana by Municipalities

In the House

HB 13 / Election Pamphlets and Absentee Ballots

HB 27 / DHSS Duties; CINA; Foster Care; Adoption

HB 117 / Sexual Assault Examination Kits

HB 163 / Nutrition Standards; School Fundraisers

HCR 4 / U.S. Countermand Convention Delegates

HJR 14 / Call for U.S. Countermand Convention

SB 6 / Eliminate Daylight Saving Time

SB 23 / Immunity for Providing Opioid OD Drug

SB 53 / Advanced Practice Registered Nurses

~ End of Report ~

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