



HOUSE ORGANIZATION: NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE

Rural legislators have a long history of working with members of both political parties in the interest of good governance. We are driven by a long-term commitment to the success and best interests of the state, not political ideology or national parties. I hope we can form a strong majority made up of members from all parties that represents the best interests of all Alaskans.

Fortunately, there seems to be broad agreement that a reasonable budget, improved public safety, and protecting the Permanent Fund are the most important priorities for the Alaska Legislature this year; and I remain optimistic that this shared understanding will prove stronger than strict partisan allegiance.



Left: Rep. Bryce Edgmon signing his oath of office with Lieutenant Governor Kevin Meyer. Standing, from left: Rep. Edgmon Chief of Staff Amory Lelake, Drew Cason, and Tyra MacKinnon

Right: Rep. Edgmon speaks on a panel at the Alaska Power Association's annual Legislative Conference. With the current deficit, it is imperative that industry leaders continue to understand the crucial nature of the Power Cost Equalization endowment



THE BUDGET

Governor Dunleavy's first budget, which he released in December, included a \$1.6 billion deficit he has promised to fill with cuts alone, as he has pledged not to consider new revenues. His rhetoric divides these cuts into two categories waste reduction and service reduction.

WASTE REDUCTION

I look forward to Governor Dunleavy's efforts to identify and eliminate waste. The Legislature has been working hard to reduce waste, and certainly some of the substantial budget cuts we have implemented over the past four years have been through efficiencies and waste reduction.

But as the Governor said when he resigned the Senate to run for higher office, while the Legislature sets the budget, because we are not responsible for executing the laws, some transformational thinking around the implementation side isn't really ours to realize.

I am eager to see savings from waste reduction but am concerned that even successfully eliminating all waste will leave us with a vast majority of the deficit intact.

SERVICE REDUCTIONS

I recognize the Governor has not been shy about the fact that to make major structural changes to our budget, we will have to make cuts that many Alaskans will find upsetting. It is our job in the legislature to vet these cuts.

If we were to consider a tax, Alaskans should know about what their household would pay. But by the same coin, if we consider cuts to health and social services, Alaskans should know what programs or facilities will no longer be available. If we cut the education budget, Alaskans should know how that will affect their local district, and teachers and students around the state. Many potential cuts would increase the burden on local governments to fill gaps left by the state, and the impacts on local taxes and services should also be explored and understood.

We continue to wait to see the Governor's budget. The deadline for the last possible day for the Governor to submit changes to his budget is February 13th, and he has elected to wait until then to share any details on how he plans to fill the \$1.6 billion gap in his original budget.

SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET

While the Governor is waiting to release details on his cuts for the upcoming year, he did this week release a supplemental budget for the current fiscal year (FY19). The budget contains a cut of \$20 million to the department of Education, money which districts around the state had included as part of this year's budget to retain teachers and meet other contractual obligations. Asking Alaska's K-12 schools to cut \$20 million through the final 5 months or less of the fiscal year is untenable and members of the legislature from around the state have overwhelmingly signaled that they think this is a very bad idea.

Another highly concerning cut included in the supplemental budget is a \$3 million cut to the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program. Alaska has struggled to find and retain VPSOs, and this money had included legislative intent language to be used by the Department of Public Safety to recruit and retain VPSOs. I believe the state has a crucial role to play in supporting public safety on and off the road system, and this cut would make rural Alaska in particular less safe.



I was pleased to welcome constituents from King Cove and the Aleutians East Borough to my office last week. Pictured from left: Mark Hickey, Gary Hennigh, Amber Jusefowytch, Mayor Henry Mack, Rep. Bryce Edgmon, Mayor Alvin Osterback Sr., Anne Bailey, Mary Tesche, and Amory Lelake.

NEW NEWSLETTER FORMAT

You may have noticed the newsletter has a new look! I hope you find it digestible and informative. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with my office anytime.

Contact my office by phone at: (907) 465-4451