



March 12, 2021

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Greetings on this 53<sup>rd</sup> day of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Session. The House was unable to organize for an extended period of time this year, much like during the 2019 session. After much work, both the House and the Senate are going forward with precarious governing coalitions. We are now doing our best to work together and put Alaska's interests first.

Although I am no longer House Speaker this session, I will serve as Chair of the Rules Committee, which is responsible for scheduling legislation to be taken up on the House Floor. I also serve on the House Finance Committee, which is working through the subcommittee budget process to craft the Fiscal Year 22. We are making the tough decisions necessary to balance the state budget and fund the important programs that keep essential services in place. The legislature is facing historic decisions this session, because our savings are depleted, and our primary source of revenue is the Permanent Fund Earnings Reserve. By overdrawing this account, we are borrowing money from future budgets and slashing our ability to grow future capital, which will hurt Alaska down the road. It is critical we take a measured, conservative approach to ensure that account can continue to grow into the future while funding schools, public safety, and other critical state services.

### Big Issues

It has been about a year since COVID-19 became a new reality for everyone. Unfortunately, the Governor's Emergency Disaster Declaration, which is necessary to access federal money, expedite government processes to fight the virus, and counter the related economic fallout has not yet been extended, but the House is committed to working with our counterparts in the Senate to remedy the situation as soon as possible

This has been a difficult time for us all. I would like to thank you for doing your part to keep the vulnerable members of our community safe through this once-in-a-century trial. Our district is well on its way to being fully vaccinated, with over 25% of eligible adults in our district already having received two doses. I have gotten my vaccine and I hope you will do the same. By getting vaccinated, we are not only protecting ourselves, but also our elders and communities.



*Representative Edgmon pictured with Representatives Hannan and Story after a floor Session*

The Capitol has enacted restricted COVID protocol this session. Access to the building is limited, CDC compliant masks are required, and all staff are undergoing frequent testing. We initially expected this to be a short session, so as to limit the chance for the Capitol to act as a COVID vector in the many communities we serve. As building gets increasingly vaccinated, however, it is my expectation that we will go the full 120 days.

The Governor has withdrawn [Executive Order 119](#) from consideration, likely in response to [HSCR 1](#), a resolution that was discussed in the House Health & Social Services Committee and objected to the executive order. EO 119 would have split the Department of Health & Social Services into two separate departments: The Department of Health and the Department of Family & Community Services. This will no longer be the case. The Governor's order drew criticism from many groups that interact with the department, including questions about its legality.

## New Grant Availability for Fisheries

The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commissions (PSMFC) has approved distribution of \$50,000,000 of CARES Act relief for Alaska fisheries, based on recommendations by the Alaska Department of Fish & (ADF&G) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), The application period is open from now through April 30<sup>th</sup>. As per the ADF&G memo:

“Applicants must certify that they incurred a greater than 35% loss in fishery participation revenue for the complete time period from March 1, 2021 to November 30, 2020 as direct or indirect result of COVID-19. The revenue loss will be calculated by comparing March 1, 2020 to November 30, 2020, gross revenue to average gross revenue for the same period over the past five years (2015-2019).”

I encourage all qualifying participants in the Alaska fisheries to apply for this federal grant program.

- Applications can be found [here](#).
- Further information on the distribution rules can be found [here](#).

## New Federal Stimulus Package

This week Congress passed the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill, the American Rescue Plan, which will mean another big infusion of federal money to the state, local communities, and tribes. As we continue to review the details, here are a few of items of note in the stimulus package:

- **Direct payments:** \$1,400 checks for eligible individuals earning up to \$75,000 and for couples earning up to \$150,000. An additional \$1,400 will also be included for each dependent claimed on the applicant's tax returns.
- **Unemployment benefits:** A supplemental \$300 per week in federal unemployment insurance will be available for qualifying individuals through September 6<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, the first \$10,200 collected in unemployment insurance will be nontaxable.
- **Child tax credit:** The child tax credit will give families up to \$300 a month per child, per month from July through the end of the year.
- **Paycheck Protection Program:** The Paycheck Protection Program has been expanded to allow more nonprofits to apply and has been funded with an additional \$7.25 billion.
- **K-12 funding:** Over \$128 billion has been allocated to state educational agencies.
- **Support for low-income families:** A temporary boost of up to \$35 a month for four months has been added to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC). There are also additional funds allocated to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to aid families with heating and cooling costs. There is also additional rental assistance and housing vouchers included in this bill.
- **Public Health:** This legislation increases funding for COVID-19 vaccine production and distribution, and for COVID-19 testing and tracing.
- **Industry support:** A number of new grant programs are included in this stimulus package targeting restaurants, airline workers and small businesses.

## New Office and New Staff

With a new office I have some new staff assisting me here at the legislature and helping with issues back home in the district. Please reach out to them if you have any questions or need assistance. I've asked each of the staff to introduce themselves with a few interesting things about themselves.

- Ariel just started with us this week. She moved to Alaska over a decade ago and has been happy to call our state home since. In non-pandemic times, Ariel plays guitar and bass in a few Juneau folk groups. She also enjoys climbing, backpacking, fishing and hanging out with her husky, Bear.
- Seth has a few years of experience working in the legislature, but is new to helping out our district. When he's not in Juneau, Seth enjoys exploring the state in Lethe, his flat stern canoe. Interestingly, Seth prefers deaf dogs. He also loves music and hopes that one day he'll be able to convince Representative Edgmon to give him a guitar lesson.



*From left to right, Seth Whitten, Amory Lelake and Ariel Svetlik*

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with any issues or concerns and remember, I work for you.

All the best,

Office Phone: 907-465-4451 or toll free at 800-898-445

Contact my staff:

Amory : [amory.lelake@akleg.gov](mailto:amory.lelake@akleg.gov)

Seth: [seth.whitten@akleg.gov](mailto:seth.whitten@akleg.gov)

Ariel: [ariel.svetlik@akleg.gov](mailto:ariel.svetlik@akleg.gov)

## On Deck Next Week...

### **Monday, March 15**

#### **House Resources, 1:00 p.m.**

Consideration of Governor's Board of Appointees:

- Big Game Commercial Services Board : Peter Buist, Michael Flores, Aaron Bloomquist, Ely Cyrus, & Martin Boniek

Alaska Oil & Gas Conservation : Jeremy Price

-- Public Testimony --

#### **House Finance, 1:30 p.m.**

[HB 69](#) – APPROP: Operating budget/Loans/Funds

[HB 71](#) – APPROP: Mental Health Budget

Presentation: Reverse Sweep by Neil Steininger, Director, Office of Management & Budget

#### **House Labor & Commerce, 6:30 p.m.**

[HB 100](#) – Extend Workforce Invest Board Allocations  
[HB 132](#) – School Apprenticeship Progs; Tax Credits  
[HB 45](#) – Worker’s Comp. and Contagious Diseases  
- Public Testimony -

**Tuesday, March 16**

**House Fisheries, 11 a.m.**

[HB 26](#) – Conflict of Interest: BD Fisheries/Game  
- Invited and Public Testimony -

**House Military & Veterans’ Affairs 1 p.m.**

[HB 125](#) – Military Family Employment Preference

**House Finance, 1:30 p.m.**

Presentation: Spring Revenue Forecast Update by Dan Stickel, Chief Economist, Economic Research Group, Tax Div., Dept. of Revenue

**House Transportation, 1:30 p.m.**

Presentation: Motor Fuel Tax by Nicole Reynolds, Deputy Director, Tax Div., Dept. of Revenue

[HB 104](#) – Motor Fuel Tax; Vehicle Reg. Fee

- Public Testimony -

**House State Affairs, 3:00 p.m.**

[HB 44](#) – Practice of Accounting, Licensure

[HB 106](#) – Missing Persons Under 21 Years Old

**Wednesday, March 19**

**House Education, 8:00 a.m.**

[HB 43](#) – Extend Special Education Service Agency

**Senate Finance Committee, 9:00 a.m.**

Public Testimony for Nome, Bethel, Kotzebue, Utqiagvik, Unalaska, Dillingham, & Other Locations

*Call in/sign up by 10:30*

Juneau: 586-9085

Anchorage: 563-9085

Elsewhere: 844-586-9085

Written testimony: [finance.committee@akleg.gov](mailto:finance.committee@akleg.gov)

**House Resources, 1:00 p.m.**

Consideration of Governor's Appointees:

- Board of Game: Stanley Hoffman, Jacob Fletcher, Lynn Keogh Jr., David Weisz, & Jerry Burnett

- Public Testimony -

**House Finance, 1:30 p.m.**

Overview: FY 21 & FY 22 Budget Overview & Update by Dept. of Health & Social Services

**House Labor & Commerce, 5:45 p.m.**

[HB 100](#) – Extend Workforce Invest Board Allocations

[HB 133](#) – AK ED Savings Programs/Eligibility

[HB 121](#) – Educ. Tax Credit: Employer Child Care Cost

**Thursday, March 20**

**House Fisheries, 11:00 a.m.**

[HB 26](#) – Conflict of Interest: BD Fisheries/Game

[HB 54](#) – Invasive Species Management

- Public Testimony -

**House Military & Veterans' Affairs 1 p.m.**

[HB 125](#) – Military Family Employment Preference

- Public Testimony -

**House Finance, 1:30 p.m.**

[HB 76](#) – Extending COVID-19 Disaster Emergency

- Public Testimony -

[HB 128](#) – Use of Internet for Charitable Gaming

**Friday, March 21**

**House Resources, 1:00 p.m.**

[HB 98](#) – Forest Land Use Plans; Timber Sales

[HB 115](#) – Aquatic Farming & Hatchery Site Leases

- Invited and Public Testimony -

House Labor & Commerce

Consideration of Governor's Appointees:

- Alaska Labor Relations Agency: Tyler Andrews

- State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors: Fred Wallis, Elizabeth Johnston, Robert "Bob" Bell, Jeffrey Garness, Loren Leman, Edward Leonetti, Jake Maxwell, Arpad "Bruce" Magyar, & Randall Rozier

- Workers' Compensation Appeals Commission: Deirdre Ford, James Rhodes, & Amy Steele

- State Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy: Enlow Walker, Lisa Radley, Nathan Missler, Rebecca Dean, & Jodi Pfeiffer

- Public Testimony -
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