



SESSION NEARS COMPLETION

Next Wednesday, May 15th, marks the 121st day of session and the constitutional deadline for adjournment. The House and Senate are busy moving policy bills while the operating budget conference committee works on hammering out a compromise budget that closes the \$1.2 billion deficit while protecting essential services and funding a Permanent Fund Dividend.

PUBLIC SAFETY PACKAGE PASSES HOUSE

While the budget has been the primary focus, the other big topic has been crime and public safety. This week, the House passed HB 49, which incorporates elements of all four of the Governor's proposed crime bills while focusing on a balanced approach that secured bipartisan support. This is a contentious and emotional topic with major impacts on quality of life and safety across Alaska, and I deeply appreciate the hard work put in by many Legislators and staff on the topic.

I especially want to thank three members of our coalition: Rep. Tammie Wilson (R-North Pole) who presided over the House Finance committee's consideration of the bill, Rep. Chuck Kopp (R-Anchorage) who Chairs the House Rules committee and has a background in law enforcement, and Rep. Matt Claman (D-Anchorage) who Chairs the House Judiciary committee, represents the House on the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission, and brings a career of legal expertise to consideration of the topic. Without those three working together, we could not have assembled a bill capable of attracting such a broad base of support.

Highlights of changes made by House Bill 49 include:

- The presumptive sentencing ranges for Class A and Class B felony offenses would increase, as would the maximum sentence for all Class A and Class B misdemeanors.
- The mandatory probation sentence for first- and second-time drug convictions is abolished. For the most dangerous illegal drugs like heroin, other opioids, and methamphetamine, judges would be able to sentence first- and second-time drug possession offenders up to one year in jail. A third drug possession conviction would result in a felony conviction punishable by up to 2 years in prison. Any drug offender who is trafficking or distributing these types of drugs is subject to much higher felony penalties and longer prison sentences.
- At the request of law enforcement officials, a new crime is established to help combat motor vehicle thefts: Possession of Motor Vehicle Theft Tools. In order to be convicted, the defendant would have to both possess tools commonly used to steal a vehicle and demonstrate an intent to steal a vehicle.
- Police and prosecutors would be allowed to aggregate the amounts stolen by a defendant within a 6-month period in order to hold serial thieves accountable.
- Under current law, not all sex offenders who are registered in another jurisdiction are required to enter the Alaska sex offender registry when they move here. H.B. 49 closes that loophole. The bill also

increases the maximum period of probation for sex offenders and bars sex offenders from receiving good time credit while in prison or on parole.

- The crime of second- and third-degree Escape is expanded to make it a felony to cut off an ankle monitor while on house arrest.
- Penalties for Failure to Appear are increased: defendants who fail to appear in court while facing a felony charge will receive an additional felony charge, and those facing a misdemeanor charge who fail to appear in court will receive an additional misdemeanor charge.
- Defendants would no longer be eligible to receive credit for time served for pre-trial electronic monitoring.
- A new felony crime is established so individuals who solicit or produce indecent pictures of minors are held accountable.
- Timely testing of sexual assault examination kits is required.
- Release-from-prison plans are required for all defendants who serve 90 days or more. The plans will be required to address substance abuse treatment plans and re-entry services.
- The presumption that courts *will follow* the pre-trial risk assessment analysis is repealed and replaced with a requirement that courts to *consider* the pre-trial risk assessment analysis in making bail release decisions.
- The incentive for earned compliance credit is changed to 30 days (served) for 10 days (earned) for good conduct on probation and parole.

House Bill 49 is now being considered by the Senate Finance committee and will likely be on the Senate floor early next week.

LEGISLATURE CREATES VPSO WORKING GROUP

I am very pleased to announce that this week the presiding officers of the legislature, Senate President Cathy Giessel (R-Anchorage) and myself, announced the creation of a six-member joint House/Senate working group to provide policy recommendations related to the Village Public Safety Officer program when the Legislature reconvenes in January.

The working group, in coordination with all stakeholders, will be tasked with providing options for the legislature to consider to structurally revamp the VPSO program during the 2020 legislative session. The solutions will primarily address the core problem of increasing the number of Village Police Safety Officers available to communities. It will address other fundamental issues such as: inequity in pay, lack of housing, officer safety, low morale, inability to generate more interest from applicants in rural Alaska, and the role Alaska Native Tribes could play in improving the program.

This working group will be Co-Chaired by Senator Donny Olson (D-Golovin) and Representative Chuck Kopp (R-Anchorage) with Sen. Click Bishop (R-Fairbanks), Sen. Mike Shower (R-Wasilla), myself, and Rep. George Rauscher (R-Sutton) rounding out the membership.

NUYAKUK FALLS HYDROELECTRIC BILL

This year, Senator Hoffman and I introduced legislation which allows Nushagak Electric and Telephone Cooperative to continue studying the feasibility and potential impacts of a hydroelectric project at Nuyakuk Falls. Nuyakuk Falls is an exciting location because the Tikchik and Nuyakuk Lakes act as natural reservoirs feeding water to the site year-round and the falls provide the “head” (elevation change that allows the water to make electricity). Between these two factors, the location has natural features that serve as the reservoir and head it needs to meet regional power needs without creating a dam or artificial reservoir that would have a drastically greater environmental footprint.

The United States Geological Survey has been monitoring the river flow above the falls for more than 50 years, and based on that data, just 25% of the river’s flow could exceed the combined current electricity demand of Aleknagik, Dillingham, Ekwok, Koliganek, Levelock, and New Stuyahok with capacity to spare, year round. Even while trying to remain somewhat conservative in estimates, the project would replace well over a million gallons of diesel every year with cheaper, cleaner, and more predictable renewable energy. Finally, while electricity is the main benefit, if constructed, the project would connect the communities it serves to a fiber internet network that would boost the speed and slash the cost of internet service.

There are years of research, permitting, financing, and construction between now and realizing any of these benefits, but the first step is ensuring the project would not damage salmon runs, and those studies can’t happen without legislative approval. Today, Senator Hoffman’s identical companion to my bill passed the House Resources committee, leaving a floor vote by the House as the final legislative step to grant that approval.

NEED A JOB? WANT TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?

Then you’re in luck! The 2020 US Census is hiring today for positions in Dillingham and every other community in Southwest Alaska.

On average, every Alaskan benefits from about \$3,000 per year in Federal spending. Over the 10-year period between censuses, that is about \$30,000 per person, or \$150,000 for a household of five. Ensuring our state and region receive adequate aid depends on knowing how many people live there, and the Census drives many State and Federal funding formulas, so it is important that we maximize participation in our state, region, and communities.

This is where you come in. The Census will be hiring Enumerators and Field Supervisors for \$25-\$31 per hour for now through next fall. They offer paid training, and have positions ranging from just a few hours a week to 30-40 hours per week, so whether you are looking for a small side-gig, a full-time job, or just have some free time on your hands, please consider applying!

Find out more and apply online at www.2020census.gov/jobs or reach out directly to one of the two Tribal Partnership Specialists the census has working with the communities of House District 37. Charmaine Ramos will be working with communities in the Aleutians while Donna Bach will be working with Dillingham and the rest of the district. You can reach them at:

Charmaine Ramos: Charmaine.V.Ramos@2020census.gov or 907-952-6261

Donna Bach: Donna.E.Bach@2020census.gov or 323-791-2381

CONSTITUENTS IN THE CAPITOL



Malia Voran from Port Alsworth was in Juneau with her grandmother for the first sailing of the MV Tazlina, which she named via an essay contest as a 7th grader in 2016.

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