

From The Desk Of Representative Paul Seaton

Weekly Legislative Newsletter from the office of
Representative Paul Seaton

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The House is still organizing, meeting in committees, and waiting for a finalized budget from the Governor to begin the budget process. So far the House has passed 5 resolutions(resolutions don't carry the weight of law) and one bill to add a second verse to the State Song. The bill passed with overwhelming approval.

To view the State song bill click below

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill_text.asp?hsid=HB0045A&session=23

The Senate has passed one resolution and the Senators have introduced 65 bills compared to 90 bills in the House

INFORMATION REGARDING OUR FISHERIES(FISHERIES COMMITTEE)

Last week, the House Special Committee on Fisheries continued with overviews of various government agencies supporting the fishing industry. The Commercial Fishing Revolving Loan Fund presented detailed information on the loans available to fisherman and programs offered to people for Product Quality Improvement. The purpose of these overviews is to educate Committee members and the public about fisheries issues.

We heard about marketing from the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute(ASMI) and conditions from the Salmon Market Information Service, a McDowell Group information service.

This week we will be continuing the overviews by focusing on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Commercial Fisheries Division tomorrow at 8am, Sport Fish and Habitat Divisions at 8:30am Friday.

The Fisheries Committee will be hearing HCR 6 (extension of the Joint Legislative Task Force) HCR 6 extends the task force for two years, however the committee will amend the bill to a one-year extension. Last year, federal funds were appropriated to fund the task force with carry-over funds available for an additional year.

Health and Social Services Information

For the next few weeks HESS will be hearing overviews of different divisions. Last week we covered the Division of Family and Youth Services and the Division of Juvenile Justice, Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, as well as the Mental Health Trust Authority.

HB 51, a bill I introduced regarding generic labeling on prescriptions drugs will be heard this Thursday in the House HESS committee.

Education Committee Information

The Education Committee heard HB 26, an act to increase the foundation formula for base student allocations. The intent of this bill is to roll the funds from the supplemental Learning Opportunity Grants (LOG) into the general education foundation formula.

HB 26 would increase the base student allocation of the foundation formula by \$118, from \$4,010 to \$4,128 per student. The total funding increase for the general education budget would equal \$23,985,200. This is the exact amount of past Learning Opportunity Grant (LOG) supplemental education funds, and thus represents no real increase in state education funding.

However, this change has two benefits: 1) It would make the LOG funding previously authorized on a yearly basis more certain, because it would be included in the foundation formula. 2) The LOG funds are not applicable a community's local education funding cap, so by including them we would effectively increase the maximum amount of funding that local school districts provide-- an issue that is very important for the Kenai Peninsula School District.

I do support a net increase in state funding for education; however, amendments were proposed to the bill, which would have increased the base student allocation. These

amendments were misplaced. It is important to keep these issues separate and introduce them in different bills. Adding such amendments to House Bill 26 may ultimately, hinder the passage of the bill. I don't think it would be wise to jeopardize the benefits of HB 26 by linking it to general education funding increases, which will be considered later this legislative session.

The committee also heard HB 19, an act mandating early funding of education by April of each year. Both bills were introduced by Kodiak Representative Stevens. Neither bill passed from the committee but will be brought up at a later time.

More Education info... Homer Teleconference with PTSO

Many people from Homer have contacted the office regarding education funding. I met with the Parent, Teacher, Student Organization (PTSO) to talk about the paramount effects created by budget shortfalls. Currently, the projections for next year could put us 2.9 million short. This would mean that 50+ teachers might be laid-off next year in the Kenai Borough. Homer High School could lose 2 ½ positions. Myself, along with other members of the legislature are looking at changing the foundation formula, the education model that provides state funding for education.

Kenai-Kodiak(2K) Legislators organize and hold constituent Teleconference last week

Residents of the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak got the chance to communicate concerns with several members of the Kenai-Kodiak Caucus of SouthCentral Alaska. Lawmakers held the first constituent teleconference this past week. Those attending were myself, Sen. Tom Wagoner, Kenai, and Reps. Mike Chenault, Nikiski, Rep. Kelly Wolf, Homer, and Gary Stevens, Kodiak. Sen. Alan Austerman of Senate District R was not available for the teleconference.

Sen. Austerman Leaves Senate

Homer and Seward residents barely got to know their new Senator before he resigned from the State Senate yesterday to take a job with Governor Murkowski. Sen. Alan Austerman will fill a position often referred to as the "fish Czar." The advisor position will advise the Governor on commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries for the State of Alaska. Most likely, the Governor will appoint a new

Senator next week after receiving nominations from the local district committees.

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