



Senate Majority News

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Two Senate Bills Pass Sunday Session Unanimously **Forestry, Fish and Military PFDs**

(Juneau) – With only 17 days left in the regular session the Alaska State Senate was back on the floor Sunday and moved out two very important bills.

The first, Senate Bill 88 sponsored by Ralph Seekins (R-Fairbanks), helps strengthen the Forest Resources Practices Act in region III of the State.

“SB 88 will allow landowners to capture some of the economic value within riparian areas, while keeping enough large trees to provide woody debris,” said Seekins. “This bill was based on the best science and technology available through state resource agencies, the private sector, as well as the University to assure that access to our renewable resources does not interfere with our responsibilities as stewards of the land.”

Seekins went on to say that SB 88 would help ensure the Forest Resources Practices Act remains compliant with the Federal Clean Water Act as well as all costal zone management standards.

The bill requires a no-harvest buffer area along most anadromous and high-value resident fish waters, but would allow harvesting of up to half the large white spruce along glacial rivers in the landward half of the buffer.

Sen. John Cowdery (R-Anchorage) also saw his bill, SB 148, move unanimously through the Senate chamber today and some might say it could not have come at a better time. Just days after President Bush declared a military victory in Iraq, Alaskan military personnel that qualify for the Permanent Fund Dividend will now have the right to visit family or travel outside the state on personal business the same as Alaskans that don’t serve and still qualify for the annual check.

This issue came to Cowdery’s attention when shortly after September 11, 2001 one of his constituents was called to active duty for 10 months, upon his return and release back to reserve status the person left state for 104 days to help an ill family member. Under current law an Alaskan resident can leave state for up to 180 days and still be eligible for a PFD check – unless you are in the military that is – then you are only allowed 45 days out of state after return or you do not qualify.

“This seemed simply ridiculous to me,” said Cowdery. “Why would we punish our country’s fighting men and women by restricting their PFD eligibility – It just made no sense to me.”

SB 148 will give our State’s military men and women the same allowable absence standards as everyone else in Alaska Cowdery said. And when asked the Senator happily announced that his constituent would receive his PFD check from last year.

Both bills will be reconsidered on Monday, before being sent over to the House of Representatives for their consideration.

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