



# Senate Majority News

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## **Legislators Pleased with Special Session Change** ***Conference Issues Considered in Regular Session***

(Juneau)—The Senate Majority responded favorably to news today that Gov. Frank Murkowski has withdrawn his call for a special session March 1.

“We appreciate the administration’s sensitivity to our concern over the appropriateness of a session within a session. We felt all along we would be able to get to an agreement on looking at these recommendations without adding another special session,” said Senate President Gene Therriault (R-North Pole).

Gov. Murkowski called the special session during his State of the State address Jan. 13 to consider recommendations forwarded by a 55-member Conference of Alaskans that met last week in Fairbanks. Today he agreed to a request from the Legislature that they address the issues beginning March 15 during the regular session, with work concluded by the end of the month.

Therriault said the timing of the special session was impractical for three senators who will be attending The Energy Council. The Council’s 2004 Federal Energy and Environmental Matters Conference will be held in Washington D.C. March 11-14.

The meeting, held jointly with the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, will focus on both legislative and regulatory issues at the federal level. Commercializing Alaska’s North Slope Gas has been on the forefront of the agendas for the last several meetings. The conference promises Alaskan legislators an opportunity for direct dialogue with senior federal officials, elected and appointed, on critical issues important to Alaska. With two applications under the stranded gas act under review, interest has peaked in how Alaska North Slope gas fits into the bigger national energy picture.

Senators Scott Ogan (R-Mat-Su/Chugiak), Tom Wagoner (R-Kenai) and Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River) will be attending.

Sen. Ogan is chairman of The Energy Council, an organization of elected legislators from 10 energy-producing states. Senator Dyson is chairman of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER).

“With the items that are up for discussion back in Congress right now, we feel their participation back there is especially critical,” Therriault said. “We are pleased we have headed off this potential conflict with the administration.”

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Today the Governor also transmitted to the legislature four resolutions forwarded by the Conference of Alaskans to constitutionally protect the dividend; limit distributions from the Permanent Fund to five percent of the market value rather than basing payouts on realized earnings; support a prudent balance in the state's Constitutional Budget Reserve fund; and back use of some fund earnings for state government.

Rather than submit bills for consideration, the Governor said he would work jointly with the Legislature to craft measures that reflect the conference recommendations, meet voter approval and provide solutions to the state's budget difficulties.

"From the point of the majority, the resolutions encapsulate a variety of suggestions, but a lot of the details would have to be worked out," Therriault said. "The conferees were working within a tight window of time, and I think the fact that there are some generalities in what they brought to us indicates the complexity of the issues that were brought to them."

Once transmitted, Therriault said he will refer the resolutions to the Senate Finance Committee for consideration.

In addition to the four resolutions, the Conference of Alaskans also submitted a letter recommending "action to balance the state's revenues and expenditures, including but not limited to, consideration of a personal income tax, other broad-based taxes and other alternative sources of income."

Sen. Therriault said he believes a constitutional spending limit must also be part of the mix.

"There are still unanswered questions about how these pieces should be knit together, so now legislators will look at the conferees' suggestions, look at the bills we already have in the hopper, the different suggestions and ideas being batted around the hallways, and see what kind of package we can put together to get the votes required," Therriault said.

Therriault said he will also work with the minority.

"The majority members have a variety of opinions on the different concepts before us, and it is my understanding from individual conversations, that so do many members of the minority," Therriault said. "Without the ability to guarantee the required 14 votes even if I had all the majority, the minority will have to play a role in this. They control whether we will get to success or not."

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