



Senate Majority News

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Senate President Asks Minority to Submit Ideas Finance Committees Best Venue for Discussions

(Juneau)—Senate President Gene Therriault has asked Senate Democrats to submit their fiscal plan ideas so all measures will be on the table when the Legislature begins consideration of recommendations forwarded last week by the Conference of Alaskans.

Although the deadline for introduction of personal bills was Feb. 15, Sen. Therriault (R-North Pole) said he plans to forward the measures to the Rules Committee for introduction.

“I have approached the minority for their ideas. While there has been a lot of talk in the halls, over lunch and in numerous informal gatherings, now it’s time to distill those ideas into legislation that can be brought to the table,” Therriault said. “Members of the minority have advocated for some time that any plan include a broad-based tax, and an income tax specifically, and I encourage them to bring those ideas forward.”

In addition, Therriault said recommendations from the Conference of Alaskans transmitted earlier this week by Governor Frank Murkowski should be taken up in the Senate Finance Committee, where the public can testify and members can question experts. Sen. Therriault was responding to a Feb. 19 letter from the minority requesting a public debate among all 20 senators meeting as a Committee of the Whole on the floor of the Senate to consider the resolutions. Several pieces of legislation have already been introduced that could serve as a starting point for discussing the conference suggestions.

The governor and Legislature have agreed the Legislature will begin considering the conference ideas beginning March 15 during the regular session.

Contrary to an assertion in the letter that a Committee of the Whole would be more efficient for shaping the final package, Therriault pointed to rules that preclude anyone other than a member of the body from speaking on the Floor. In addition, a Committee of the Whole is unable to work on proposed committee substitutes.

Therriault said referring the resolutions to a Committee of the Whole would also circumvent Uniform Rule 24(d) that requires the referral of all bills involving appropriations, revenues or bonding to the Finance Committee before they can be advanced to second reading. Therriault assured adequate time for debate on the Senate Floor once the measures reach that stage.

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