

Alaska State Legislature

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Senate Finance Committee

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Operating Budget Heads to Senate Floor Co-Chairs Say Senate Budget Reflects the Priorities of the Alaskan People

(JUNEAU) – With a preliminary budget figure that is slightly lower than the House version and a touch higher than the governor’s request, the Senate Finance Committee moved out its version of the operating budget Friday.

Despite the session starting nearly two weeks later than last session, the Finance Committee moved the budget on exactly the same date as last year. Senate Finance Committee co-chair, Sen. Lyda Green (R-Mat-Su) said that is because of the great team effort put forth by all members of the Legislature and the administration.

“After nine years in the Legislature and five years on finance, this has got to have been the smoothest operating budget process I have ever been witness to,” said Green. “We put together a good budget in a timely manner, which addresses the priorities of the State, while still coming in at a lower bottom line figure than last year’s authorizations to date.”

Green went on to say that this year’s budget should not need any supplemental funding next year, except for unanticipated expenses, such as fighting a higher than average number of fires.

Sen. Gary Wilken (R-Fairbanks) agreed that the process was a smooth one and commended the hard work of everyone from the sub-committees to the Alaskan citizens who took time to testify.

“We should be proud of the work we have done here today,” said Wilken. “The people of Alaska sent us to Juneau with a clear mandate – reduce the cost of government by prioritizing the programs most essential to Alaska. I believe this budget fulfills that mandate. This budget is less than last year’s spending level while preserving the programs Alaskans themselves said were the top priorities.”

Included in those priorities are:

- An operating budget that, properly managed, should need no supplemental funding in January.
- A \$159 per student increase in K-12 funding;
- Fully restored school construction debt reimbursement at the 70 percent level;
- Increased University funding by \$9.5 million;
- Increased funding to the Individual Living Centers and the Infant Learning Programs; and
- Funded Power Cost Equalization at the requested level, while guaranteeing that the Permanent Fund will receive the NPR-A funds it is entitled to under the Constitution.

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From the Finance Committee, the Senate version of the operating budget will go to the full Senate for passage. After that it is headed to a Conference Committee where House and Senate Finance leaders will iron out the final details.

Green says there is still a lot of work to be done before we have a final budget, but expects the process to continue to be a smooth, cooperative team effort among all participants.

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