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Technology Review May Mean Big Benefits Subcommittee Hears Promise of More Savings, Efficiency, Service

(ANCHORAGE) – An inventory of the state’s information technology (IT) assets is an essential first step in making sure current and future investments are best utilized to improve public service, make government more efficient and save money, state IT experts told members of a new House Finance subcommittee today.

“Technology can bring great benefits to the people of Alaska, but it is critical that we know we are using our investment in technology to our best advantage, especially as more of the budget goes for computers, databases, communications and other systems,” said Rep. Eldon Mulder, co-chair of the House Finance Committee, who chaired the first meeting of the Information Technology Subcommittee.

The subcommittee is charged with reviewing Alaska’s technology investments, establishing an inventory of computer assets and their capabilities, and providing a means of evaluating how well state departments are spending their technology resources. It is to report to the full Finance Committee next legislative session.

“This subcommittee will help the full Finance Committee consider IT requests in the context of a full IT plan, instead of the piecemeal, uncoordinated effort we’ve had to date,” Mulder said. “We get millions of dollars in funding requests each year for computers that may not be coordinated. We want to understand what we’re being asked to fund, why, and how those investments can be used most effectively.”

Several state computer experts voiced support for the panel’s efforts. Kevin Brooks, administrative services director at the Department of Fish and Game and head of a group of other such departmental directors, said the state needs to avoid duplication of computer systems and databases, promote standardization to ease interagency cooperation, replace outdated, inflexible mainframe systems and promote equal access to new technology.

Ken Bischoff, administrative services director for the Department of Public Safety, said increasing state dependence on computers makes a comprehensive information technology plan among the state’s most pressing needs. He said it has been 25 years since the state last made an overall effort to modernize and streamline its computer systems, though the Department of Administration recently began efforts to hire a consultant to begin such a plan.

“It was clear from the testimony today that this is something the state should have done a long time ago,” said Mulder. “I’m looking forward to the results of this subcommittee’s work. The sooner we have that, the sooner we can begin to accomplish the goals we have set out.”

Members of the committee also include Finance Co-chair Rep. Bill Williams (R-Ketchikan), Rep. John Harris (R-Valdez), Rep. Lisa Murkowski (R-Anchorage) and Rep. Gretchen Guess (D-Anchorage). Also present at today’s meeting was Rep. Ken Lancaster (R-Soldotna).

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