

From The Desk
Of Representative Paul Seaton

Weekly Legislative Newsletter from the office of
Representative Paul Seaton

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HB 118-Transporter Bill passed from the House
Fisheries Committee

I mentioned in the past newsletter that we had introduced HB 118. The bill allows fishermen to transport commercially caught fish for another fisherman, or allows fisherman to hire their own tender. HB 118 was introduced for those interested in moving fish to market more quickly by allowing fishermen to consolidate their catches and transport their product on one vessel.

The committee responded very positively to the Legislation. After noticing that all state regulatory agencies and the public supported the bill, Rep. Ethan Berkowitz suggested the bill should move forward. Buck Laukitis, and Jason Koontz, both Homer residents, spoke very eloquently in support of the bill. The bill will next be heard in House Resources.

To view the bill click one the link below:

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_fulltext.asp?session=23&bill=HB118

Governor's State of the Budget address-March 5th

The halls are buzzing with rumors about the budget. I wish I had official information to give everyone, but we are waiting for the Governor's address on the 5th at 7pm. From the rumors I have heard, both service providers and recipients may be short this upcoming year. There could be a \$200 million (roughly 10%) decrease compared to last year's operating budget. For some additional background, the legislature finished in 2001, a 5-year plan that cut

\$50 million each year. Last year, the legislature passed a "hold the line" budget, which means no increases from the previous year.

The legislature can add money during the budget process; however, the Governor has the final say with a line-item veto. There is a possibility of requiring more user fees to preserve many of the services we have come to rely upon.

Kodiak Representative Seat Still Vacant

We are still waiting for the appointment of the new Kodiak Representative. I expect that an appointment will be made by the end of this week.

Seward Recorder's Office

Many of you in Seward have been concerned about the Seward Recorder's Office. In the past, the recorder's office (a Dept. of Natural Resources function) was staffed, and provided space for, by the State Court System. As the court's workload increased, the court system could no longer provide employees or space for the recorder's office. Last year, the court quit funding activities associated with the recorder's office. DNR responded by requesting a part-time position, which was funded by the legislature last year. This year the court system kicked the recorder's office and all accompanying documentation out.

In talking with DNR, my office sent to the Office of Management & Budget a funding request to lease space. This request has now been funded in the Supplemental Budget and currently the State Recorder's Office is requesting bids for leasing space in Seward. The Seward Recorder's office isn't out of the woods yet. Next year's budget is around the corner, leasing space and staff funding will have to be addressed soon. I will keep working on the issue until all of the problems are ironed out.

EDUCATION ISSUES

This week the House Education Committee met in Joint Committee with the HESS Committee to hear an overview of the state's plan to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). Alaska's Accountability Plan (the Alaska version of the federal No Child Left Behind Act) is expected to be approved by May 1st. The Department of

Education and Early Development is currently working to secure some leeway under NCLBA with regards to special circumstances unique only to Alaska such as small schools in rural towns and the many native languages.

Education Reimbursement Option

We also discovered last week that school districts could secure Medicaid reimbursement funds for "administrative claims." If school district employees keep track of time spent helping Medicaid-eligible students, districts can be reimbursed for the time by the federal government. The state Dept. of Education has indicated reimbursement has occurred in the past; the Dept. will be working to make this reimbursement option more accessible to local school districts. If any educators have comments on this topic, please email Cameron

Health, Education, and Social Services- Issues

This past week, HESS confirmed two members to the Board of Education and Early Development. We then moved on to hear House Bills 21 and 107. These bills are very similar in content. Both bills aim to extend the longevity of breast and cervical cancer screening and treatment programs for the underprivileged. After some very emotional and supportive testimony, we passed both bills out of HESS and on to the House Finance Committee for review.

The committee also confirmed four members of the Professional Teaching Practices Committee. After the confirmation hearings, we reheard House Bill 25 (HB 25). As you may remember, HB 25 is the Health Care Services Directive Bill, also known as "the five-wishes bill." Committee members and the bill's sponsor offered extensive amendments. We decided to hear the bill again later this week after amendments are incorporated into a draft committee substitute. Many folks offered testimony, all of which was positive. It's encouraging to see committee and community members working together on this bill.

Fisheries Committee

The House Fisheries Committee met twice last week. We held hearings on HB 90 (Salmon product development tax credit) and HB 118 (fish transporter permit). HB 90 is based on a similar development tax credit for the groundfish fisheries

in the late 1980s. It seeks to spur new product form development in the salmon industry by providing a credit on the Fisheries Business Tax. All of this credit would come out of the state's share of the tax, not the local communities. HB 90 is a bill that came out of the Salmon Task Force. There is wide support for the concept, but the bill was held over in committee so further work could be done. This week we will be hearing HB 104 (security for the collection of the Fisheries Business Tax) and HB 22 (licensing and bonding of boat and limited entry permit brokers). We will likely continue work on HB 90.

Bill Access System

Remember, all bills can be found on the State's BASIS system. You will find the system to be accessible at the website below.

<http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp>

Live on the Web

Remember that you can hear just about any committee hearing or tune into just about any legislative session-present or past-by going to Gavel to Gavel, public radio and tv's broadcast of the state legislature as it occurs.

Click on the link below to connect to Gavel to Gavel.

<http://www.ktoo.org/gavel/schedule.cfm>

If you need to contact the staff please click below:

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