

From The Desk
Of Representative Paul Seaton

Weekly Legislative Newsletter

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Contact Information

Toll Free (800) 665-2689

Fax (907) 465-2689

Website: <http://www.RepPaulSeaton.com>

Email: Rep.Paul.Seaton@Legis.state.ak.us

Access previous newsletters by clicking on my website and finding the newsletter link.

2K Teleconference Call-In

We held our monthly constituent teleconference last week. All of the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak legislators were present to listen to their constituent's feelings on what is going on, from within the legislature to their own backyards. Again, the biggest topics of conversation were on education funding and efforts to keep the Independent Living Centers open. For those who called in on Capital Budget items, please note our funding priority list is due by April 18th. So, if you have any additional information on your projects, please get it to my office as soon as possible.

The People are Calling...

During the last week, my office has received quite a few calls from constituents urging the passage of House Bill 15 (HB 15). HB 15 is the 'no-call' legislation, which would establish a database of people who do not want to receive telephonic solicitations, at no charge to you. I have signed on as a co-sponsor of this bill. It will next be heard in Finance, though a date has not yet been scheduled. You can always look on BASIS to check any bill's status.

Recent Action on the House Floor

House Concurrent Resolution 11(HCR 11), formerly known as Alaska Wild Salmon Day, is now a whole week, extending from June 30-July 4! HCR 11, sponsored by Rep. Wolf, passed the House unanimously and now moves to the Senate for hearings.

We passed two Senate bills on the floor last week, which now move to the Governor for consideration. The first bill

was Sen. Therriault's bill, SB 20, which extends the term date of the Board of Marine Pilots. The other senate bill was a Special Concurrent Resolution, sponsored by Sen. Lyda Green, which establishes November 2003 as Avalanche Awareness Month.

Speaker Kott announced the appointments of Rep. Jim Whitaker and Rep. Mike Hawker as co-chairs of the new Ways and Means Committee. Other members of the committee include Rep. Max Gruenberg, Rep. Cheryll Heinze, Rep. Vic Kohring, Rep. Carl Moses, Rep. Norman Rokeberg, Rep. Bruce Weyhrauch and Rep. Peggy Wilson. These members face the difficult task of addressing Alaska's urgent fiscal issues. The nine-member committee will analyze saving, spending and revenue raising options to help control the state budget.

New Local Legislation

I introduced House Bill 232 (HB 232) last week, which establishes a Homer Mercury Classic to be operated by the Boys and Girls Club of the Kenai Peninsula. Any units of the K.P. Boys and Girls Club would be able to hold the classic, but we are calling it the "Homer Mercury Classic," since they will be the first to hold it. It will be a bi-annual classic, with drawings in the spring and fall. Members of the Boys and Girls Club, who already have the necessary equipment and expertise to manage the operation, will monitor the temperature. I think this is a good bill because kids will have a hands on participation, while earning money for their program in a fun, non-competitive and educational way. HB 232 was referred to the House Finance and Labor and Commerce Committees. I will let you know when it is scheduled for a hearing.

Operating Budget Discussions

Last week residents from Homer and Seward called in to the House Finance Committee to testify on the Operating Budget. I was glad to hear from so many local folks who took time out of their busy day to call in on this important subject. I was able to listen to the people testifying from Homer. Unfortunately, the Seward Operating Budget talks coincided with the monthly Kenai/Kodiak constituent teleconference. Though I was not able to listen to Seward's testimony, I was able to get notes on people's input. You may not be surprised to hear that constituents from all over District 35 share the same concerns. The apprehensions I have been hearing throughout the session remained unchanged at these hearings. The

primary areas of worry were cuts to education funding and the Independent Living Centers. Thank you all for voicing your community's concerns and letting us know where you stand.

Tuesday we start working the operating budget on the floor. We will see numerous minority amendments offered, and although I may like some, the amendments will be voted down so that the completed budget can be adopted. We have each struggled to get our priorities funded through the committee process. I agreed to support the final budget even if I was unable to convince a majority to adopt my priorities.

Several things were incorporated - restoring 10 million to the Educational Learning Opportunity Grants, restoring full funding of pupil transportation, and restoring all but \$35,000 of the \$619,000 proposed cut to the Independent Living Centers. Some additional cuts and additions may occur with bills offered outside the budget process.

HESS Information

We heard one new bill in HESS last week; HB 142, sponsored by Rep. Heinze. HB 142 strengthens law relating to ocular post-operative care, specifically for people who undergo cataract surgery. There has been a rash of ophthalmologists who come in from out-of-state to perform cataract surgeries without spending any time with the patient, and then leave the patients aftercare to a less qualified optometrist. This business of 'cataract-farms' is profitable for the doctors, though potentially dangerous for the client. We passed this bill out of committee with the hope that it will make eye surgery safer. We also cleaned up our committee calendar by passing out four bills that we had already heard several times. Those were House Bills (HB) 171, 154, 165, and 167. HB 171 repeals state-funded Charter School grants, but does not lessen funding. In fact, our Charter Schools will receive federal funding that secures them more money than before. HB 154 prevents children under 5 from attending kindergarten, with exemptions for exceptional children. This is an effort to keep spending down by preventing school districts from 'pumping up' their numbers by enrolling children too young for kindergarten. HB 165 repeals funding for Community Schools throughout the State. Our Community Schools should be able to stay open without these funds, since they are not a primary funding source. HB 167 establishes the local

match amount on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse grants; currently the level is 10%. The original bill would have changed the community match requirement to 25%. I amended the bill to a 17.5% match the first year, which will graduate to 25% the next year. Hopefully this will allow programs to secure additional funding over the next year. Rep. Kelly Wolf (R-Nikiski) has graciously offered to help people find corporate funding, since this is his area of expertise. Please call his office at 1-800-463-2693 if you need his assistance.

Education Committee

The Education Committee heard only one bill last week. HB 19 is Senator G. Steven's bill that mandates a separate education budget be completed by April 1st. This bill would address the problem in which school districts are forced to write their budget without knowing the level of state funding they will be receiving. I supported the bill and it has moved on to HESS committee.

This week the Education Committee will be hearing all of the bills that propose to increase the Base Student Allocation: HB 26, HB 220, and HB 223. Please contact the members of the Education Committee and especially Chairman Gatto to voice your support for these bills. HB 222, sponsored by Rep. Kapsner, would adjust the Foundation Formula for inflation. This bill has not been scheduled for a hearing as of yet. Please contact Chairman Gatto to voice your support for hearing this bill in Committee.

Fisheries

The Fisheries Committee is currently winding down. We have heard and deliberated on all but one of the bills sent to our committee, HB 22. This past week we heard and moved House Concurrent Resolution 10 (HCR 10), Riparian Habitat Restoration. HCR 10 is a straightforward resolution by Rep. Wolf that recognizes the importance of fisheries habitat and the role that community groups and non-profits can play in fostering habitat protection. HCR 10 was passed out of committee with full support.

HB 130 sponsored by Rep. Weyhrauch deals with Anti-Trust Lawsuits and a mechanism to fund salmon marketing. It would take 15% of the awards from anti-trust lawsuits and devote the funds to the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI). After much debate, the Committee passed HB 130 from committee with two amendments. One removed the

retroactivity clause from the bill. The other added a provision to ensure that the state would only garnish funds from punitive damages and not compensatory damages. Although the Committee had many reservations about this bill, most of the remaining issues were legal questions. The Committee made the decision that the Judiciary Committee could best deal with these issues.

There has been much confusion and change in administration positions on HB 191, which would overhaul the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP). The Fisheries Committee hearings were instrumental in illuminating problems with the approach, which would have eliminated the local public process for coastal zone projects. An entirely new version is supposed to be proposed for the 4/11 Resource Committee hearing but final details are not yet available. Inconsistencies still remain between the state statute change and the federal rulemaking process, so stay tuned.

State Affairs Committee News

This Committee is currently overwhelmed with diverse topics. We are dealing with several prison bills, motor vehicles, concealed deadly weapons, boating safety and even a new legislative hall. Please check the LIO for bill details.

Bill Access System

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, TV and public radio broadcasts 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:
Lauren Radcliffe, mailto:Lauren_Radcliffe@legis.state.ak.us
Cameron Yourkowski,
mailto:Cameron_Yourkowski@legis.state.ak.us
Chris Knight, mailto:Chris_Knight@Legis.state.ak.us

