



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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Democrats Announce End-of-Session Priorities

“Kids – Veterans – Power Cost Equalization”

JUNEAU – House and Senate Democrats today outlined their end-of-session priorities at a morning press conference in the Alaska State Capitol. With four calendar days left of the 2nd session of the 22nd legislature, minority members emphasized several issues deemed the most obvious fixes to the state’s budget.

“Kids. Vets. PCE.” said Senate Minority Leader Johnny Ellis (D-Anchorage). “That’s what this all comes down to. We’d like to see funding for school construction and major maintenance, healthy education funding, housing for Alaska’s veterans, and full funding of Power Cost Equalization.”

House and Senate Democrats urged the passage of equitable school construction and major maintenance legislation, calling on the legislature to approve general obligation bond legislation to fund the 19 most needy schools in the state. This priority does not touch the state’s general fund, but instead puts a \$200 million statewide bond package before voters.

“It would be negligent to gavel out without addressing the deferred maintenance situation in Alaska’s schools. Interest rates for bonds are rock bottom and the state has a near zero debt load,” said Rep. Mary Kapsner (D-Bethel). “Can this legislature stand by and feel the job is done when Alaska school children are subject to third world conditions? It’s dangerous and it’s unconscionable. Yet there’s an obvious fix.”

House and Senate Democrats pointed the spotlight on another education necessity: restoring equity to the education foundation formula.

“For the last decade we have raised school funding by only 7 percent while inflation has gone up 30 percent,” said Rep. Gretchen Guess (D-Anchorage). “Our children deserve better.”

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Priorities cont'd

House and Senate Democrats aim to fully fund Power Cost Equalization (PCE) with a \$15.7 million enhancement to the endowment fund, making the program self-sufficient.

“Residents in rural Alaska pay two to three times as much for electricity than their counterparts in urban areas, even with PCE,” said Rep. Reggie Joule (D-Kotzebue). “If we can put the Power Cost Equalization program on its own two feet, we don’t have to revisit this issue year after year.”

House and Senate Democrats rounded out their priority list with an endorsement of Governor Tony Knowles’ package of veterans’ bills. “We have an opportunity to honor the veterans who served to protect our nation,” said House Minority Leader Ethan Berkowitz (D-Anchorage). “There are several options on the table to provide housing opportunities for retired and disabled vets. Let’s give those men and women who served the thanks and respect they deserve.”

“We are looking at the entire picture, and these recommendations represent the doable,” said Rep. Albert Kookesh (D-Angoon). “You don’t want students to just graduate from high school. You want a good foundation so that they can go on to bigger and better things. That means we need to protect and expand infrastructure as a basic core value.”

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