



NEWS FROM Representative Mary Sattler Kapsner

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School Construction: What's on the Table?

The *Kasayulie* lawsuit, which successfully argued that the state discriminated against rural schools in the way it has funded capital construction needs, has been a tremendous help in focusing public policy makers' attention on the problem. Two bills have been introduced this year to address the backlog of school construction and major maintenance needs. The House Finance Committee introduced **House Bill 281** on the first day of session. It would provide for **general obligation bonds** for construction and maintenance needs of **public schools**, renovations of state buildings, as well as capital improvements at the University and state harbors. On January 26 the Governor introduced **House Bill 322**, a **school construction and major maintenance** plan funded, in part, by **revenue bonds**.

For those of us who have been waiting for years for the legislature to appropriate money for our school needs it would seem we are finally on the right track. There are, however, pros and cons in each approach, and we've still got a lot of legislative water to wade through before we get to an acceptable final bill.

HB 261 - GOB Bonds: Schools/University/Harbors/ADA

- \$655 million over five years
- Funded by General Obligation Bonds
 - Requires vote in 2000 General Election.
- Funds construction and deferred maintenance for public schools. Would address current maintenance lists but next year's school construction list.

Concern: Rural schools on current list could be bumped next year by urban schools that have previously not competed to be on the construction list because they've been able to bond and capture reimbursements from the state. Some of our most critical projects, having been on waiting lists for years, could face more waiting.

HB 322 - Public School Constr/Mtnc Funding

- \$510 million over the next three years
- Funded with tobacco settlement funds, AHFC Revenue Bonds, and State General Funds
 - Does not require a vote by the people
- Funds entire maintenance needs list and addresses top 40 school construction needs on department's priority list.

Concern: Proposed spending level does not fully fund top 40 construction projects. Some projects would receive only planning money, with the argument that they would then be at the top of the list as projects ready to go. "Ready to go" could mean additional years of waiting for the next funding package.

Legislature Focuses on High School Qualifying Exams

This year's high school sophomores will be the first class of Alaska students who will be required to pass a qualifying exam in reading, writing, and math to obtain a high school diploma. Test exams will be issued this year.

Concern about the test and the implications for students who may have difficulty passing have been reflected in virtually every legislative hearing on education this year. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development responded by providing information about the qualifying exam at a number of forums last week. The Commissioner told legislators that just as the practice test that will be given this year will tell sophomores what areas they need to focus on, the department expects to learn from the results as well. For example, the tests will continue to be revised with a goal of removing as much regional and cultural bias as possible.

If you have access to the net you can actually take a practice test yourself. It is available through the Anchorage School District web site at <www.asd.k12.ak.us>.

Office Notes . . .

On Monday, February 7, my **Fisherman's Tax Obligation Loan Program** bill was heard in House Fisheries Committee.

During this coming week I will be introducing legislation dealing with **inhalant abuse**. If you are concerned about this topic and would like to see the draft bill please call the office at 1-800-323-4942.

I've had several meetings with key individuals to talk about solutions for long term funding of the **power cost equalization** program.

On February 15 I will be in Anchorage for the **AFN Special Convention on Katie John**. If you are traveling to Anchorage for this important strategy meeting, I will see you there.

Mary Kapsner