

Alaska State Legislature
House of Representatives
Minority Leader



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News from Juneau

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Greetings from Juneau where the House Finance committee has just finished with their version of the operating budget (House Bills 50 & 51). Beginning during Monday (April 12) morning's floor session my fellow minority members and I will offer amendments, both cuts and increments, to that budget blueprint.

Traditionally, budget decisions are made in the majority's closed caucus – which means none of our budget amendments will gain approval. People often ask me why we perpetuate this exercise in futility, knowing the final outcome well in advance. The answer is threefold.

First, amendments demonstrate our budget priorities. The budget goes through the Senate next and will end up in a conference committee (three Senators and three Representatives). By establishing our priorities now, we begin the dialogue that leads to compromise. For example, in previous sessions the majority has attempted to flat fund K-12 education dollars (failing to account for inflation and population growth). Minority amendments helped assure full funding for education.

Second, our amendments offer the opportunity to speak out publicly on the budget. Most of the budget process takes place in subcommittees with a few days in the full Finance committee. Meanwhile, the business of the legislature continues. Even people who follow the Juneau scene closely have a hard time keeping up. On Monday, the budget will be the only thing we work on, and we have a forum to tell Alaskans why we believe what we believe.

Thirdly, our amendments expose "true colors". Virtually every politician campaigns in support of the University of Alaska, economic development, and lower taxes. Political reality dictates that these causes are sacrificed when a caucus decides on a budget. The University of Alaska will not receive sufficient funding, programs that have proven records of private sector job creation will suffer cuts, and municipal property taxes will rise in response to cuts to Municipal Revenue Sharing. We will offer amendments to ameliorate the effects of these cuts and our amendments will fail. In the next election, Alaskans will have a record to inform them if their legislators' walk matches their talk.

In other news, on Monday I am introducing House Concurrent Resolution 6 – “Establishing a Task Force on the Impacts of Transfers of Governmental Functions to Local Governments.” The purpose is to study the effects of transferring services from state to local government. As the State of Alaska works to reduce spending we contemplate cessation of certain services. Local governments, by necessity or by desire, will provide some services eliminated in state government. These changes have significant effects on both the local governments and Alaskan taxpayers. For more information, the sponsor statement is on my web page at:

<http://www.akdemocrats.org/bios/ebpics/hcr6ss.pdf>

The Alaska Municipal League (AML) has recognized the importance of our budgetary deliberations. To see an example, see one of their web pages at:

<http://www.alaska.net/~aml/confence.htm>

As always, I appreciate your thoughts and input. Keep them coming and I will do my best to keep you informed.

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