

Alaska State Legislature  
House of Representatives  
Minority Leader



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District 13

News from Juneau

April 24, 1999

**Berkowitz Bulletin**  
**Volume 3, #8**

Greetings from Juneau where I just realized I have not sent out a BB in two weeks. Fortunately, my electronic friends have kept up with plenty of correspondence to keep me on my toes.

Since my last e-mail my budget predictions were realized. None of our floor amendments were successful but we did attract a few majority votes on assorted efforts. With that, the budget moved to the Senate, went through a similar process there, and returned to the House. As tradition dictates, we declined to accept their changes and appointed a conference committee. The conferees are Senators Parnell, Torgerson, and Adams joined by Representatives Mulder, Therriault, and Grussendorf. In the next week these six legislators will determine funding levels between the House and Senate numbers and return a final document to both chambers.

This means that, for example, the conference committee must pick a funding level for Municipal Assistance and Revenue Sharing somewhere between the zero funds in the House version and the \$31.9 million the Senate approved. Either way, the most money this program can receive will be a 33% cut from last year's funding level.

Translation: local property taxes will be forced up and Municipal services will be cut.

As you might guess, local elected officials are not very happy with the majority's decisions on Municipal Assistance and Revenue Sharing. I cannot count the number of Mayors, Assembly members, and School Board members who have called or dropped by lately. When discussing an amendment to restore funding for the program I explained to my colleagues that this issue was so important Mayor Mystrom had even called me! To explain, he typically only calls legislators on the other side of the aisle.

Kidding aside, I do harbor significant concerns about the budget. The House minority caucus pledged at the midway point of the session that we would not vote to further drain Alaska's saving account (the Constitutional Budget Reserve) without a long-term plan. To date, the majority has failed to heed our call and we have just over three weeks remaining in the session. They do have the option of spending the Earnings Reserve of

the Permanent Fund instead of securing our CBR vote, but I hope they are not so shortsighted.

The appointment of the conference committee has effects beyond the budget – we now move to the 24-hour rule. This means hearings on legislation no longer have to be noticed a week in advance, merely 24 hours. In other words, both good and bad legislation can move in a hurry. If you have concerns about a particular bill, be sure to let me know so my office can help you track it.

Meanwhile my bill, House Concurrent Resolution 6 – “Establishing a Task Force on the Impacts of Transfers of Governmental Functions to Local Governments” received significant support from the Alaska Municipal League and passed the House Community & Regional Affairs committee on Thursday, April 22. I hope we will take steps to minimize the trauma when transferring state functions to municipalities. The next stop is the Finance committee and then the floor. As is typical in committee hearings, some changes were made to the bill. The updated sponsor statement is on the web at:

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

If you have questions, concerns, or random thoughts I appreciate hearing them. Keep in touch and I will do my best to keep you informed.

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