

on the move

When Governor Knowles called a special session, he limited the agenda to the following topics. No bills may be considered whose subject lies outside the governor's proclamation.

Capital budget

HCS CSSB 32 (FIN)

This bill includes the usual capital appropriations, reappropriations from previous years, supplemental funding for the current fiscal year, and appropriations from the constitutional budget reserve which require a three-fourths vote of the legislature to enact. The House has passed the capital budget.

Long range fiscal plan and advisory vote

SCS CSHB 231 (FIN)

This bill outlines a long-range fiscal plan and asks Alaskans to vote "yes" or "no" on both the plan in the bill, and the governor's plan announced in February; sets a special election for September 14, 1999.

Advisory vote

SB 1001

This bill includes just the advisory vote provisions of HB 231 and asks voters to vote "yes" or "no" on two separate plans.

Appropriation to a new account

CSHB 232 (FIN)

This bill makes a special appropriation from the constitutional budget reserve to a newly established account called the "Alaska Income Account", as outlined in HB 231.

Task force to analyze additional revenue sources

House and Senate long range plans call for \$100 million in new revenues without specifying what they are. This task force would explore possible new sources of revenue.

Senate GOPers send legislature to purgatory

SENATE REPUBLICANS SENTENCED THE LEGISLATURE to special session purgatory last Wednesday by not agreeing to a long-range budget plan. It's not that the Senate majority can't get religion on a long-range budget plan, it's just that they have too many sects and not enough inter-denominational communications.

On one side, we have the Senate GOP Pentacostal budgeters, on the other are the GOP Zen budgeters and floating in the middle are the GOP agnostics. The Pentacostal budgeters are spouting hellfire and brimstone and focusing on the coming budget apocalypse. They preach repentance and reform. The Zen budgeters seek budget enlightenment through introspection and intuition rather than spreadsheets. The agnostics don't know what to believe so instead of placing faith in a higher being they're focusing on material wealth and political gain



Watching this internecine religious struggle are the Senate and House Democrats, the House Republicans, and the governor. The struggle between the Senate majority sects is important because Republican Senate President Drue Pearce inexplicably wants 11 of the 15 Senate Republicans to sign on to any final long-range budget plan.

Her other option, of course, is to seek help from the Senate Democrats to get to heaven (if we define heaven as enough votes to pass a plan through the Senate). She has not approached the Democrats for help and, during a regular session post-mortem, she reiterated that nothing happens in the Senate until she has 11 Republicans in her flock.

Here's the rundown on the Senate Republican majority religious sects:

The Republican Senate Pentacostals

As many as eight Senate Republicans belong to this church. Led by Pearce, with chief acolytes Tim Kelly and John Torgerson, they preach the wages of budgetary sins and note salvation involves pain and sacrifice. They reject general taxes and special taxes but want

(Purgatory, cont'd on p. 2)

Capitol Undercurrents



Mayor in Waiting?

Republican Sen. Dave Donley is focusing considerable time and energy on Anchorage issues much more suited to the Anchorage Assembly than the floor of the state Senate. Some suggest he's meddling in local issues because he lusts for the mayor's job. It's starting to wear thin, though, with some legislators. Ketchikan Republican Sen. Robin Taylor said, during floor debate about a Donley bill on underground utilities in Anchorage, that if the Senate could just put aside Anchorage-specific bills the legislature could get out in 90 days. More recently, the House killed a Donley bill that restructured the municipal body that decides Anchorage highway projects and added Anchorage legislators to the group. During House debate, Republican Rep. Gary Davis of Soldotna said: "let me get this straight, the senator believes the municipal highway group is dysfunctional so he wants to add legislators to the group?" Republican Rep. Andrew Halcro, who was 'carrying' the bill on the House side for Donley, responded to the criticism that the legislature was treading on municipal issues by saying: "I admit to my fellow legislators that I have been asked to walk a dog with fleas."

Full disclosure

During a joint session on the final day to confirm five gubernatorial appointees to a restructured public utility commission, Rep. Fred Dyson stood up before the confirmation vote to announce a potential conflict of interest. He told the senators and representatives that one of the governor's nominees had contributed money to him during the last campaign. From the back of the crowded House chambers, Republican Sen. Tim Kelly yelled out he was rethinking casting a 'yea' vote for the nominee considering the bad judgement the nominee showed in supporting fellow Republican Dyson.

Unbearable

The end of the regular session was a series of late nights on the floor of the Senate—I didn't get home until after 1:30 a.m. for four nights. On Sunday night (actually early Monday morning), a Senate page delivered a note to me on the floor from the senate secretary's office. "Kim—your wife Marylou called to say there's a bear in your yard. She's inside and okay but be careful when you come home." I did make it between the car and the house okay a bit later but the store-bought, supposedly bear-proof shed that holds the garbage cans was dismantled.

(Purgatory, cont'd from p. 1)

Alaskans to tithe a large portion of their permanent fund dividends while they promise to continue to cut government spending. They say the state will go to hell if Alaskans aren't baptized in a cold budget shower.

This is a relatively new sect in the Senate. Most members used to believe that salvation was found simply by making government abstain from eating—fasting. Their creed used to be the Republican Party Platform, especially provisions that mandate limited government and untouched dividends. Their new creed is the same as the old but they've exorcised the untouched dividend part.

The Republican Zen Senators

Five Republican senators belong to this sect. The most enlightened monk is Republican Sen. Rick Halford who, with neophytes Jerry Ward and Lyda Green, intuitively believes things will work out if everyone chants the PFD mantra: "Ooooooooooooooooooooo don't let the dividend dddddiiiiiiiieee."

The Republican Senate Agnostics

The agnostics are the special focus of the Pentacostal proselytizers. To get to the 11 Senate Republicans the Senate president says she needs, each of the two agnostics are going to have to heed her call to the altar and then she is going to have to convert one of the Zen budgeters.

The agnostics may prefer to light incense in homage to PFDs but are caught on the horns of a political dilemma. In other words, is it more dangerous to be stoned by the Senate GOP Pentacostals (who control the Senate majority and dispense the perks of Senate power) or is there more political risk in forcing the electorate to tithe a healthy portion of their PFD?

Baptizing the agnostics may be less difficult for Pentacostal preacher Pearce than converting at least one Zen budgeter to get to her magical 11-vote goal. The agnostics do understand the satisfaction of material gain that can accrue when you align with the big group. But, while there is good reason to believe the suggestion that some Zen budgeters are less focused on the state of perfect spiritual blessedness and more focused on the political Nirvana promised by defending the PFDs, they seem more pure in their commitment to the dividend, even in the face of material blandishments.

It is perhaps unfair to paint the battle between members of the Senate majority as a battle between opposing religious forces. But the passions ignited in the fight over the future of the permanent fund and permanent fund dividends almost rival the passions that sparked the crusades.

As the Senate Republican caucus sinks to aggressive proselytizing, House Republicans, House and Senate Democrats and the governor are drifting toward the Society of Friends, or Quakers. There is, after all, a real need for friends and peacemakers during this special session.

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