

University Area Community Council – Senator Gray-Jackson’s Report

April 1, 2020

First, I want to reach and say that I hope everyone is doing well, and staying safe at home during these trying times. I understand the difficulty that many of you face in trying to change your routines; whether you are now forced to work from home, or have to proceed working with the public in more difficult circumstances. I thank you for your dedication in making sure that the daily essentials we need are there for us.

Very early Sunday morning, after working through the night, we passed a couple of vital pieces of legislation that will help Alaskans get through the socio-economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus.

The budget that passed Sunday morning includes much-needed funding to protect public health and safety, while the COVID-19 emergency legislation will help the people of Alaska during these turbulent times. The details of both bills are below, along with updated information on the COVID-19 outbreak in Alaska and across the globe. There is also detailed information about the Federal stimulus bill and the help available to small businesses, and those who are out of work.

Senate Bill 241 COVID-19 Emergency Legislation

The Alaska Legislature passed Senate Bill 241 late Saturday night to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in Alaska.

The bill extends the current public health emergency to November 15th and will help prevent families and small businesses from going bankrupt. This legislation:

- Halts evictions and foreclosures for Alaskans experiencing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.**
- Provides \$10 million from the Disaster Relief Fund to assist with any expenses that arise during response efforts.**
- Allows for vote-by-mail in elections in 2020.**
- Pauses the eviction of tenants who are unable to pay their bills as a result of COVID-19.**
- Pauses foreclosures on property owners.**
- Prevents Alaskans who are struggling from having their utilities shut off.**

- Enables the Department of Community, Commerce and Economic Development to provide grants to small businesses.
- Outlaws price gouging.
- Extends the PFD application period to April 30, 2020.

Expansion of Unemployment Benefits

The Alaska Legislature unanimously passed a bill expanding unemployment benefits for Alaskans impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Gov. Dunleavy signed the bill on Wednesday, March 25.

7,806 Alaskans filed for unemployment benefits for the week ending on March 14. (1,120 the week before. The weekly high during the Great Recession was 4,655)

HB 308 will help the hard-working men and women of Alaska during the COVID-19 crisis.

- **The bill includes a retroactive effective date of March 1.**
- **Waives the normal one week waiting period and the requirement that those affected be ready and able to work.**
- **Removes the cap on the number of dependents and increases the allowance for dependents from \$25 to \$75 per dependent per week.**

HB 308 ensures employees receive unemployment benefits whether they are furloughed, laid-off, lose work hours, or are forced to stay home to care for children or other loved ones as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

- **Alaska has seen a significant increase in the number of applications for unemployment benefits.**
- **Alaskans can file once a week instead of every two weeks.**
- **Nationally, around 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week. Unemployment insurance claims jumped nearly 1,500% in two weeks.**

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development is anticipating an increase in the number of people filing for unemployment benefits.

- **Due to the anticipated increase in claims, the department is asking for people first to file a claim online. <https://my.alaska.gov>. Once on the homepage, click on "Unemployment Insurance Benefits. "For assistance you can call toll-free 1-888-252-2557. In Anchorage call (907) 269-4700. Unemployment assistance is available for anyone who is "unemployed through no fault of their own."**

Federal Stimulus Package

Congress passed a \$2.2 trillion stimulus package.

- **This is the largest stimulus package in U.S. history. Alaska is slated to receive a minimum of \$1.25 billion from the stimulus package.**
- **\$1,200 in direct payments to taxpayers who have an income of up to \$75,000 a year.**
- **\$2,400 for a married couples making up to \$150,000 a year.**
- **An additional \$500 per child 16 or under.**
- **Those that make up to \$99,000 a year can receive a partial payment.**
- **A family with two children with an income over \$218,000 would not receive any stimulus payment.**
- **Total cost is \$250 billion.**
- **The payment should arrive within three weeks.**
- **13-week extension in unemployment benefits. Unemployed Alaskans would receive an additional \$600 per week above the state unemployment rate for four months. Unemployed Alaskans could receive an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits on top of the state maximum of 26 weeks. The bill provides for 39 weeks of unemployment benefits for Alaskans not eligible for benefits. (Self-employed) Includes furloughed employees, gig workers, and freelancers.**

Other Details: *(From the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL))*

- **Creates a \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund for state, local and tribal governments. (Alaska is estimated to get \$1.2 billion)**
- **\$30 billion for an Education Stabilization Fund for states, school districts and institutions of higher education for costs related to the coronavirus.**
- **\$45 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund for the immediate needs of state, local, tribal and territorial governments to protect citizens and help them respond and recover from the overwhelming effects of COVID-19.**
- **\$1.4 billion for deployments of the National Guard.**

This level of funding will sustain up to 20,000 members of the National Guard, under the direction of the governors of each state, for the next six months in order to support state and local response efforts.

An additional \$4.3 billion, thorough the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to support federal, state and local public health agencies to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus.

Requires the Department of Homeland Security to extend the Real ID deadline

for full implementation by states from October 1, 2020, to October 1, 2021.

\$25 billion for transit systems.

- **These funds would be distributed through existing formulas including the Urbanized Area Formula Grants, Formula Grants for Rural Areas, State of Good Repair Formula Grants and Growing and High-Density States Formula Grants using fiscal year 2020 apportionment formulas.**

\$400 million in election security grants to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus in the 2020 federal election cycle.

- **States must provide an accounting to the Election Assistance Commission on how the funds were spent within 20 days of any 2020 election.**

Expands unemployment insurance from three to four months, and provides temporary unemployment compensation of \$600 per week, which is in addition to and the same time as regular state and federal UI benefits.

Establishes a \$500 billion lending fund for businesses, cities and states.

The Budget Bill: House Bill 205 (aka Conference Committee CS for House Bill 205)

The Alaska Legislature passed an emergency budget bill in the overnight hours on Sunday. (23-13 in the House and 13-4 in the Senate)

- **The bill takes \$1.1 billion from the CBR. The CBR vote in the House was 30-6. (30 votes needed). The vote in the Senate was 16-1 with three excused absences (Costello, Hughes, and Reinbold).**
- **The bill has been sent to Gov. Dunleavy for his signature.**

The budget bill totals \$4.74 billion in unrestricted general funds (UGF).

\$120 million in capital project funding.

House Bill 205 includes a \$1,000 PFD that will be paid in the fall.

The bill funds essential government services and supports the response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Alaska.

COVID-19 response items include:

- **\$75 million for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to bolster emergency medical and trauma systems.**

- **\$5 million to the Disaster Relief Fund to be used by the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs to help with the public health disaster response.**
- **\$5 million for the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to alleviate COVID-19-related homelessness.**
- **\$2.7 million for the public health services provided by the Municipality of Anchorage.**

Specific Items Funded include:

- **\$30 million in 1-time education funding over the K-12 funding formula.**
- **\$151 million for the Alaska State Troopers.**
- **\$14 million for the Village Public Safety Officer program.**
- **\$21 million for senior benefits.**
- **\$98 million for Pioneer Homes.**
- **\$21 million for Senior Benefits to make sure the elders who built our state live with dignity.**
- **\$1 billion to inflation proof the Permanent Fund.**

I hope you are enjoying my monthly E-newsletter. If you're not receiving them, please send your email address to my staff at Keith.Bauguess@akleg.gov.