



REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK

End of Session Newsletter: 2020

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Dear Neighbors,

In just a few months, it seems that the world has been turned upside down. The highly contagious virus COVID-19 swept across the globe, killing hundreds of thousands, sickening millions, and shutting down economies as we all distanced ourselves to slow the spread. In Alaska, we did a good job of keeping the virus at bay. However, we must remain vigilant as we open back up.

While Alaska has so far been spared widespread sickness and death, we have not been spared economic harm. Over 110,000 Alaskans filed for unemployment. Businesses, both big and small, are suffering huge losses and in danger of closing forever. Hard-working Alaskans have had to sacrifice their life savings to pay the bills.

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alaska State Legislature worked with Governor Dunleavy to quickly pass emergency legislation in late March to help families and Alaska's small businesses. Senate Bill 241 included millions of dollars for public safety and public health. The legislation prevents utilities from shutting off water and power during the current public health emergency, and it halted evictions and foreclosure if a person is facing financial hardship due to the coronavirus.

It's heartbreaking to reflect on all that has been taken from us during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we will prevail. A vaccine will be found. Businesses will reopen, and children will return to school. Until then, protect your family, enjoy your friends, find satisfaction in your work, and help your neighbors.

Please be safe,

Chris Tuck



Rep. Tuck on the floor of the Alaska House of Representatives on the first day back in the Capitol Building after a lengthy recess due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (May 18, 2020)



Rep. Tuck posing a question to Alaska's Chief Medical Officer Anne Zink during a briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic. (March 4, 2020)

I'm Here for You!

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A Responsible Budget and Irresponsible Vetoes

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the Alaska State Legislature to pass a state budget in record time this year. Last year, fights over the budget dragged on through the summer resulting in funding delays and budget uncertainty for cities, boroughs, and school districts. This year, spurred on by the onset of a global pandemic, the Legislature finished up its budget work in late March. The Governor signed the budget bills and issued his budget vetoes in early April.

I'm proud of the work the Legislature did to craft and pass a responsible budget. We fully funded public education, dramatically increased funding for public safety, and set aside tens of millions of dollars for COVID-19 response and relief. I wish we could have prevented Governor Dunleavy's sweeping budget vetoes and done more to help the people of Alaska through these tough financial times.

Items Funded in the FY 21 Budget

- \$1.26 billion to fully fund public education.
- \$99 million for COVID-19 response and relief.
- \$28.5 million for behavioral health programs.
- \$7.2 million for homeless assistance.
- \$34.8 million for Alaska's Pioneer Homes.
- \$21 million for the Senior Benefits Program.
- \$5 million for disaster relief.

Budget Items Vetoed by Gov. Dunleavy

- \$30 million cut in one-time education funding.
- \$12.5 million cut to the University of Alaska.
- \$4.3 million cut in Pre-K grants.
- \$100.2 million cut to the School Bond Debt Reimbursement Program.
- \$31 million cut to Medicaid funding in the FY 20 supplemental budget.
- \$30 million cut to community assistance.
- COVID-19 response funding eliminated from the Municipality of Anchorage.



SB 241: PROTECTING ALASKAN FAMILIES

NO evictions

NO foreclosures

NO utility shut offs

if a person is experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19.



Evictions and foreclosures are prohibited through June 30, 2020. Utility shutoffs are prohibited through November 15 or when the disaster is declared over (whichever is sooner). Debt that accrues is still owed.

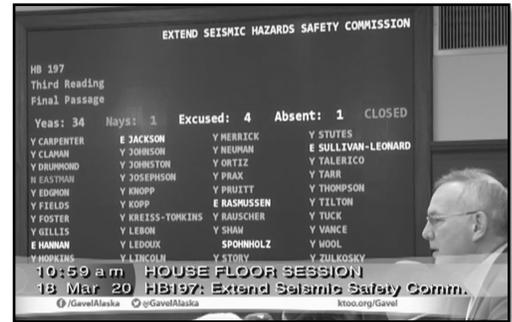


Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission

When the COVID-19 pandemic cut short the 2020 legislative session, a lot of important legislation was left unpassed. Thankfully, the bill I sponsored to extend the work of the Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission passed with near-unanimous support just days before the Legislature went into recess.

Since 2001, the Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission has helped prepare Alaska for future earthquakes by bringing together public and private sector experts to make recommendations to local, state, and national officials on how best to protect public safety and vital infrastructure like roads, bridges, runways, and buildings.

House Bill 197 was an uncontroversial bill that simply extends the sunset date for the commission until 2028. HB 197 was passed when other bills died because Alaska is threatened by earthquakes 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year.



LB&A Update: Follow the Money

The committee I chair, the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee, has the responsibility of overseeing the work of the Legislative Auditor, a constitutionally mandated position created to audit the state government. In March, the 2019 statewide single audit was released, and it shows instances of waste and mismanagement of state resources that are simply unacceptable.

"We are unable to obtain appropriate audit evidence to provide assurances over tax revenues because Department of Revenue management denied auditors sufficient access to Department of Revenue oil and gas production tax-related settlement/appeal files."
 - Excerpt from the 2019 Statewide Single Audit

Significant Problems Identified in the 2019 Audit

- A revenue classification misstatement of \$1.1 billion and a \$548 million understatement of revenue in the Constitutional Budget Reserve.
- \$69.2 million of FERC-related revenues that should have been deposited into the Constitutional Budget Reserve were instead used to offset oil tax credits.
- The Department of Natural Resources did not transfer \$199 million that was required to be transferred into the Alaska Permanent Fund.
- The Department of Health and Social Services created a “golden ticket” program (since discontinued) where they overrode internal controls designed to prevent unallowable costs, unallowable activities, and fraud for certain providers.
- Lack of preauthorization for dental procedures for children and young adults covered by Medicaid. The audit found examples of the excessive use of dental crowns. For instance, claims were paid for one three year-old who received 14 crowns in one visit.



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Legislative Newsletter



Legislative Newsletter - Summer 2020

Unemployment Assistance

Alaskans can file weekly for unemployment insurance.

- File online through the my.Alaska.gov portal.
- For questions, contact the Anchorage unemployment claim center at (907) 269-4700. (Toll-free: 1-888-252-2557)
- Alaskans are now eligible for up to 13 weeks of extended unemployment benefits.
- The Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program was authorized by the federal CARES Act.
- The 13 weeks of additional benefits are paid after people exhaust their normal state unemployment benefits.
- The 13 weeks of additional benefits can be claimed until December 26 of this year.
- The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development will mail a notification of potential eligibility to those who are about to exhaust their unemployment benefits.

Help for Alaskans

The Alaska State Legislature passed Senate Bill 241, extending the public health emergency in Alaska until November 15. The Bill:

- The bill halts evictions and foreclosures as long as the state is under a public health emergency.
- Prevents utility shutoffs.
- Provides workers compensation to first responders, nurses, and doctors diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Outlaws price gouging.
- Protects Alaskans experiencing COVID-19-related financial hardship from defaulting on state loans and having their assets seized.
- Allows vote-by-mail in the 2020 elections.
- Enables the state to provide grants to small businesses.