



## Legislative Update From Representative Bryce Edgmon



Volume 3, Issue 16

May 22nd, 2009

### **GOVERNOR SIGNS BUDGET BILLS, VETOES ENERGY MONEY**

Yesterday, Governor Palin signed into law the six appropriation bills passed by the legislature during the last session. The bills signed were the Operating, Mental Health, Supplemental and Capital Budgets, an appropriation bill for low-income energy assistance, and a bill appropriating Non-Transportation Stimulus funds.

I'm pleased with the Governor's decision to accept the vast majority of the federal stimulus funds, including over \$170 million for education. She also approved increases in the PCE program, municipal revenue sharing, and the low income heating assistance program. And although it was a tough year for some of our communities because of the lack of general funds dollars, District 37 had no projects vetoed for the second consecutive year. I'm very happy about that.

However, after spending a lot of my time this past session working on energy issues, I'm disheartened that the Governor—apparently because of philosophical differences with the federal government and a questionable argument about the mandating of building codes—chose to veto \$28.6 million in energy funding from the stimulus package. It is beginning to look like Alaska will be the only state in the Union to reject these funds.

Unless the Governor changes her mind and chooses not to submit the letter of rejection to the Department of Energy, the funds will be scooped up by another state. The irony is that the money will go to a state that does not face

an energy crisis like we do here in Alaska. The other alternative is that the legislature could override the governor's decision, but even so, it is ultimately up to the Governor to apply for the funds.

This is a breakdown of the items in the \$28.6 million that was vetoed:

- ◆ \$2 million for an expanded energy audit program for state buildings and schools
- ◆ \$4 million for smart meters and net meters
- ◆ \$1.8 million for consumer education
- ◆ \$4.5 million for weatherization and retrofit of community buildings
- ◆ \$2 million to develop building energy-efficiency standards
- ◆ \$7 million to the Renewable Energy Grant Fund
- ◆ \$2.5 million for renewable energy research & development
- ◆ \$3.9 million for energy-efficient equipment rebates and incentives
- ◆ \$750K for energy-efficiency training and education
- ◆ \$100K for cost sharing in commercial building energy audits

## Notable Legislation From This Session

*A Continuing Series of Summaries of Passed Bills*

### ***SB1—Alaska Minimum Wage.***

This bill will increase the state minimum wage from \$7.15 an hour to \$7.25 on July 24<sup>th</sup> this year. Then on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, the wage will further increase to \$7.75—which is 50 cents higher than the federal minimum. This represents the first increase in Alaska’s minimum wage in six years.

### ***SB3—CFEC as Information Resource.***

This will allow Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDORs) to receive fisheries data and statistical information free of charge from the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission. This info can be helpful to ARDORs (such as our district’s Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference) in identifying economic trends and creating development opportunities.

### ***SB89—Retirement Benefits: Territorial Guard***

This measure will make sure that retirement benefits continue to be paid to our veterans of the Alaska Territorial Guard

while Congress works with the Department of the Army to permanently authorize federal payments. These emergency payments to our veterans will continue for up to eleven months.

### ***SB148—Liability for Tribal Road Construction***

Alaska’s FY2008 share of federal Indian Reservation Roads program funds was \$40 million. Another \$45 million was included in this year’s Stimulus package. By resolving issues of liability, SB148 will speed up agreements between the state of Alaska and federally recognized tribes to collaborate on transportation projects.

### ***SJR3—Firearms in National Parks***

This resolution was meant to send a message to Washington D.C. that Alaska supports a recent National Park Service regulation that allows carrying firearms in national parks and refuges. It may have worked. This week Congress approved a bill that puts the Park Service regulation into statute.

## Send Your Thoughts and Concerns

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