



Dear Neighbor,

I'm happy to share news about child care legislation ([HB 89](#)) passing **unanimously out of the Health and Social Services Committee after being amended to include employer tax credits for businesses that subsidize child care**, and after adding language enabling the Department of Health to use grants to incentivize higher quality child care. The Finance Committee is this bill's next stop, and I appreciate Rep. Julie Coulombe for her leadership in advancing this bipartisan legislation. Alaska Public Media is running a survey on Alaskans' access to child care, you can fill out the form [here](#). Here are some other legislative updates:

HB 80 Public Safety:

Our Health and Social Services Committee also passed [HB 80](#), Rep. Andy Josephson's bill to close the legal loophole that resulted in a murder at the Anchorage Zoo and a debilitating attack on Angela Harris at the Loussac Library. **This is absolutely critical public safety legislation and I hope we can get it signed into law this year**, and I really appreciate Mr. Harris for her ardent advocacy to close this loophole and ensure other Alaskans are not put at risk like she was.

HB 121/SB 101 Renewable Portfolio Standard:

Rep. Jesse Sumner's [HB 121](#) had its first hearing in House Energy last week, and Senator Löki Tobin's [SB 101](#) is having its first hearing in Senate Labor and Commerce this week. As data presented in House Energy illustrated, **renewable energy is the cheapest source of electrical generation today**. Tragically, most Alaskans have been missing out on the affordability benefits of renewable generation due to the lack of a Renewable Portfolio Standard. Our cost exposure is growing substantially as



Cook Inlet gas runs out, so we need to act quickly to transition to a more renewable portfolio.

Senate Finance Releases Committee Substitute:

The Senate Finance Committee released its Committee Substitute (CS) for the operating budget, and **added \$15 million for child care assistance grants and \$15 million for Home and Community Based Services for seniors and Alaskans living with disabilities.** The Senate budget includes funding for education equal to a \$680 increase in the BSA, and unlike in the House that funding is not tied to an unfunded Constitutional Budget Reserve draw. **The Senate budget is balanced due to having a \$1,300 rather than \$2,700 PFD.** A \$1,300 PFD is still too large in my view, as spending at that level leaves almost no funds available for capital investments beyond federal match, but it is certainly more responsible than \$2,700.

As you may recall, I introduced legislation to set the PFD at \$1,000. **In terms of the state budget, a \$1,300 PFD costs approximately \$180 million more than a \$1,000 PFD.** That is equivalent to the amount of BSA education funding we're seeking this year, or put in different terms it would be enough on top of matching funds to fund a range of renewable energy and transportation capital projects across the state. We need to consider opportunity costs when we're thinking about the size of the Permanent Fund Dividend compared to other needs in the state.

Senate Advances Pension Reform:

On Friday, Senate Labor and Commerce advanced [SB 88](#), the pension reform bill that is one of the Senate's and our House Coalition's top two priorities. SB 88 has already been scheduled for consideration in Senate Finance for this week. **Huge thanks to SB 88 bill sponsor**



Senator Cathy Giessel for her work on this issue. We will be hard-pressed to have a functioning state government or public education system if we don't improve public employee pensions.

Civil Rights:

HB 99: Thanks to Community and Regional Affairs Co-Chair CJ McCormick and committee members Justin Ruffridge, Rebecca Himshoot, and Donna Mears for voting to pass HB 99 (non-discrimination legislation) from committee. The bill is now in Judiciary, where Chair Sarah Vance has said she will not hear the bill, which is not acceptable.

HB 105: The administration's school discrimination bill was re-written via Committee Substitute in an attempt to make it less odious; the issue now is that the bill represents a very costly and probably unworkable mandate on schools, with requirements ranging from new construction of bathrooms to impossible-to-implement parental permission slip policies. My take on this is that Rep. Ruffridge made a valiant effort to find a way to fix the bill, but the underlying bill was so problematic that fixing it probably just isn't possible.

A "Complete Fiscal Plan"?

Last week the Governor invited legislators to a press conference on a fiscal plan, and said he is open to all options that stabilize the state's finances. I hope his stated flexibility on the size of the

PFD reduces the likelihood of budget gridlock, and I agree that we should have votes on revenue measures on the House floor. **Raising \$100 million or so by modernizing our internet corporate tax statutes and closing the S Corp loophole would help ensure a more stable budget.** I think it is unlikely that broad-based revenue measures pass, but we should have an opportunity to vote. I'll keep advocating that we bring bills to the floor that would improve Alaska's fiscal stability, because we should approach fiscal stability consistent with the aphorism, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

See you around the neighborhood,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Zack', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Zack

Representative Zack Fields - House District 17
Serving Downtown, South Addition, Forest Park, North Star, and Fairview