

Senator Gray-Jackson's Notes
Midtown Community Council
May 10, 2023

- SB22 making Juneteenth a paid state holiday passed the Senate on May 3rd with a 16-4 vote. It will go to the House and meet its companion bill HB 157 sponsored by Representative Stanley Wright.
- Senate Bill 23 requiring a Use of Force Registry was heard in Senate State Affairs on May 2nd and will remain open for public testimony at a future meeting.
- Senate Bill 24 relating to Mental Health Education for K-12 students is in Senate Finance and is scheduled for a hearing next week.
- HB30 establishing Filipino Heritage Month passed the House unanimously a few weeks ago. It is the companion bill to Senate Bill 30 and will be heard in Senate State Affairs on Thursday May 4th.
- SB131 was introduced that would require education on Asian American and Pacific Islander's history, cultures, and contributions to the U.S. Senate Bill 131 will not be heard in the Senate State Affairs Committee this session but we are gathering supporting documents to ensure its passage during the next session.
- **Budget-** The Capital budget, SB 41, prioritizes \$30 million for major projects across the state such as major school maintenance, and \$32 million for the University of Alaska's capital needs. In formulating the capital budget, the Senate Finance Committee prioritized capturing federal funds and providing grant writers for communities to have the ability to secure federal grants, establish food security and resource preservation, strengthen state-wide energy programs, and address deferred maintenance needs. The capital budget represents \$50 million more than the Governor's budget. Some of the Senate-sponsored projects include:
 - Over \$900,000 for the Anchorage Flashing Yellow Arrow and Signal Head Display improvements which seek to improve pedestrian safety.

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- \$2 million for the UAA Health Workforce Diversity Expansion Project.
- Over \$650,000 to the Department of Public Safety for investigative and forensic electronic equipment upgrades.

- Currently, district-specific projects are not included in the Capital Budget, but I intend to bring forward several floor amendments to address a few projects within my district.

- The budget must move out of Senate Finance and then it will head to the Senate floor for a vote and then forwarded to the House.

- The operating budget (HB41) was finalized by the Senate Finance Committee last week and will be on the Senate floor for a vote next week. CSSB107 passed the Senate which provides for a 75/25 POMV split- this means 75% for services and 25% for a dividend. It also provides for a \$648 BSA increase and a sustainable dividend - of \$1,300. However, there is a provision in the bill to change the split to 50/50 if \$1.3 billion in new revenue is confirmed by Legislative Finance in FY27. This bill results in a balanced budget with a surplus of approximately \$90 million. My top priority has always been establishing a comprehensive and sustainable fiscal plan. This includes revenue which is why I am a co-sponsor of SB114. Under SB 114, non-C-Corp entities making significant profits from Alaska's oil and gas resources will pay the same tax rate as C-Corps. The new 9.4% tax would apply only to entities making over \$4 million in profits from oil and gas production or pipeline transportation, and only to their profits above \$4 million. In addition, it also changes oil company tax credits from \$8 to \$5. After serving four years in the Senate, this is a step in the right direction to finally work toward having a fiscal plan in place.

- The Education Committee, which Senator Löki Tobin chairs and I serve on, heard repeated testimony about the fiscal challenges that face our schools, as well as potential solutions. I have been impressed by the experts who shared their knowledge and insight with our committee and the supporters

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who offered powerful public testimony to support education. While increased funding is not the silver bullet that will solve all our problems, I am convinced that a meaningful increase in the base student allocation (BSA) is desperately needed to help our students maximize their potential. As you may know, the BSA has been mostly stagnant since 2017; meanwhile, costs for goods and services have risen sharply, which has resulted in staff shortages, school closures, and program eliminations. Although I have consistently supported a \$1,000 increase in the BSA, the anticipated \$648 presents a reasonable compromise. Although we will pass the budget prior to the end of the session – May 17th at midnight, there are additional concerns which will probably require a special session - possibly in October.

- Mental Health Matters. I am a member of a National Task Force on Workforce Mental Health Policy and had the opportunity to attend our second meeting in Chicago last week. This collaboration of legislators from across the U.S. with a mission of exploring and advancing workforce mental health policies is amazing. I served on the subcommittee to address Behavioral Health Workforce Shortages and Establishing State Resource System. My three goals during the interim follow:
 - Develop resources in the workplace to address mental health issues.
 - Develop a mental health work group through legislation to make it formal.
 - Develop ways to encourage employees to express their mental health issues while assuring confidentiality.

Always representing your interests!



Interim: 907 269-0174 Session: 907-465-4930

Email: Sen.Elvi.Gray-Jackson@akleg.gov, Besse.Odom@akleg.gov, Harlyn.Andrew@akleg.gov, Jeff.Stepp@akleg.gov