



Legislative Update From Representative Bryce Edgmon



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New Edgmon Legislation Focuses on Power Cost Equalization

This week I introduced HB 294, legislation relating to the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) program, in an attempt to jumpstart a conversation about immediate energy concerns in rural Alaska. The bill proposes raising the level of PCE coverage from 500 kWhs per month per household to 700 kWhs. It would also restore the PCE subsidy (also at 700 kWhs) for schools and businesses that existed before 1999.

The battle against energy costs in the bush has to include strategies that are both long-term and near-term. But it also requires immediate measures to keep communities viable as lasting solutions are developed and implemented. It's my hope that HB 294 will help bring attention to the struggles faced in the here and now by rural residents, businesses, and school districts.

HB261—Low-Interest Loans for Entry Permits—Passes Fisheries Committee

On Thursday evening my bill to establish lower interest loans for limited entry permits through Section B of the Commercial Fishing Revolving Loan Fund was heard by the House Fisheries Committee. Rep. Steve Thompson, chair of the committee and a co-sponsor of legislation, led a good, thorough examination of the bill and also moved an amendment to make it clear that the new

loan terms will apply only to new borrowers. The members passed the legislation onto its next committee of referral—House Finance—with a gratifying level of support.

In addition to offering permit loans at two percent below prime to resident Alaskans ineligible for financing through commercial banks or CFAB, HB 261 would also raise the maximum loan amount available for these loans from \$100,000 to



Staffer Tim Clark, left, with Annie Fritze and Mike Davis, of UAF's Bristol Bay campus. Annie and Mike are in from Dillingham with a group of students who are part of the Rural Development Leadership Summit.

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\$200,000. In recent years, entry permits for fisheries all over the state are selling for far more than \$100,000, so it only makes sense to make a higher amount of funds available for financing.

I particularly like this bill's potential to make a real difference for younger Alaskans who hope to own and run fishing operations. We need to encourage such ambitions; in the end, our young skippers will make vital, long-lasting contributions to our communities.

Finance Committee Continues Preliminary Overviews

The House Finance committee continued to receive broad-based briefings from several state departments this week. These overviews of our government's many sectors are certain to stretch into next week as we comb through the governor's proposed Operating Budget. As the Finance subcommittees get underway with their detailed budget considerations, the full committee will likely begin hearing legislation awaiting review on the fifth floor.

I chair Finance subcommittees for the Departments of Transportation and Corrections, and our hearings are scheduled to commence early next week.

Performance Scholarship Program Gets a Report Card

Last week Department of Education Commissioner Mike Hanley and Diane Barrans, who heads the Alaska Commission on Secondary Education, gave me an early peek at the first annual report for the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS). Alaska high school students can earn Performance Scholarships by meeting a set of core course requirements before graduation. The funds they are awarded can be used at colleges, universities, and accredited vocational training centers within the state. The APS is a merit-based scholarship available to Alaska high school graduates who meet a set of core requirements to receive funding to pursue college and/or career training within the state of Alaska.



Bristol Bay Borough Mayor Dan O'Hara was in Juneau this week advocating on behalf of the Borough. Here he chats with Edgmon staffer Jodie McDonnell, one of the mayor's constituents from Naknek.

The draft report indicates that of the 2322 Alaska high school graduates in 2011 to receive an APS award, 99 (4.3%) are from Southwest Alaska. (The Department of Labor and Workforce Development defines Southwest Alaska as the Aleutians East, Bristol Bay, and Lake and Peninsula Boroughs, as well as the Aleutians West, Bethel, Dillingham, and Wade Hampton census areas.) I was a little crestfallen to learn that only 28 of the 99 scholar-

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ship winners from Southwest Alaska accepted the award.

Although I support this merit-based scholarship program, like a number of other rural legislators I'm also concerned about the difficulty rural schools may have in delivering the curriculum students need to qualify for it. I also believe that the program should have a needs-based component to give opportunities for secondary education to a wider range of our young people. The circumstances some kids live in put them at a real disadvantage when it comes to qualifying for performance-based scholarships. We need more than one avenue to help out these kids with higher training and education.

I'm hoping this first report card on APS will at least help to spur the delivery of the wider range of educational resources for our District 37 schools. The report will be officially presented next week, and I expect it to be a useful tool as the Legislature continues to develop ways to make sure this program will benefit rural and urban students alike.

Education Chair's Bill Would Repeal State Intervention in Schools

In a joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Committees on Wednesday, Representative Alan Dick (R-Stony River) explained his logic behind HB 256, his legislation to repeal state intervention in schools. He said that the current model of intervention needs to shift from punitive to cooperative. He also argued that instructional strategies need to be more aligned with the frame of reference of the students being taught. Kids need to see the real-world practicality of what they learn in a context that makes sense to them.

Representative Dick referenced the Moore Case, a court case filed in 2004 that was finally settled just this week. The case challenged the state's accountability in providing adequate education required under the Alaska Constitution. The court found that the state was not meeting its constitutional obligations in Alaska's lowest-performance-level schools. In Representative Dick's view, both the school districts and the Department of Education and Early Development need to be accountable for making sure students in the schools within intervention districts are getting a quality education. It is his hope that by repealing state intervention in schools, a more collaborative and cooperative approach between the state and the districts will develop.

For my part, I see this issue as related to the harmful rigidity that the No Child Left Behind mandate imposed on rural schools. I agree with Representative Dick that we need to allow and encourage our educators to work on effective ways of teaching kids that take into account the particular cultures and contexts in which many Alaskans live.

Keep in Contact

Address:
Rep. Bryce Edgmon
Capitol Building, Room 416
Juneau, AK
99801

Phone: 907-465-4451 Toll Free: 1-800-898-4451
Fax: 907-465-3445
Email: Rep.Bryce.Edgmon@legis.state.ak.us
Adam.Berg@legis.state.ak.us
Tim.Clark@legis.state.ak.us
Jodie.McDonnell@legis.state.ak.us