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Legislative Information Sources

- BASIS (Legislature’s Website)
- Legislative Information Offices
- Gavel to Gavel
- Majority & Minority Press Releases
- Individual Legislator Newsletters
- Social Media

BASIS

The Legislature’s website is the place to start when looking for information. The homepage has links to floor session calendars and committee hearings. (BASIS stands for “Bill Action, Status, & Inquiry System”)

Homepage address: akleg.gov/index.php

Tracking Legislation in BASIS

At the left of the BASIS homepage on the fourth tab down is the tab “BILLS & LAWS,” which has links to legislation, committees, hearings, and many ways to sort and find information on legislation.

Some links in BILLS & LAWS:

- Bills in Committee
- Subject Summary
- Sponsor Summary
- Passed Legislation
- Tools: Bill Tracking Management Facility (BTMF)
- Past Legislatures (Archives): Information on legislation from previous legislatures

BTMF is one of my favorite pages. On BTMF, you can set up an account and select bills to receive notification of action on, including being scheduled for a hearing or a floor vote. It’s very helpful if you’re tracking a particular bill and don’t want to keep checking BASIS.

Text Message Updates

You can also receive notification on action of legislation through text message. To receive text message updates, text a bill number to 559-245-2529.

When typing a bill number in BASIS, BTMF, and to receive text notification updates, you do not need to capitalize HB or SB, and you do not need to use spaces. For example, you can just type “hb102”

Status of Legislation

The best way to find the status of legislation is to look at the bill in BASIS. On every page on the legislature’s website is a search field where you can put in a bill number. Once you pull up the bill, scroll down and click on the option to “Display Committee Action with Bill History” and it will show you all the hearings a bill has had. Other tabs are:

- **Full Text** – Every version of the bill that has been read across on the floor
- **Fiscal Notes** – All the fiscal notes that have been read across on the floor
- **Amendments** – Access to amendments as they are offered on the floor of the house or the senate
- **Minutes and Audio** – Access to the minutes and audio of hearings
- **Documents** – Access to any documents associated with a bill that a committee aide has posted in BASIS. This is also where you will find proposed committee substitutes and proposed fiscal notes that have not yet been read across on the floor.

All Daily Action

One way to check for all floor action on all legislation for any one day is to look in BASIS under “Actions by Date.” A bill will also be listed here if a legislator signed on as a cosponsor on that date, which can be confusing until you figure that out, because one wouldn’t generally think of that as the bill having had action.

Publications

On the left side of BASIS is the [Publications Tab](#), which is a page that has links to various publications, including:

- Directory of State Officials
- The Alaska Constitution
- The Citizen’s Guide to the Constitution
- The Uniform Rules
- Constitutional Convention Files
- Executive Orders
- Administrative Codes, Regulations, & Alaska Statutes
- Legislator and staff contact lists
- Handbook on Alaska State Government
- Guides to the budget process and the legislative process
- Many other things

Legislative Information Offices

In addition to handling all legislative teleconferences, Legislative Information Office staff are there to help people find information, including helping you find your way around BASIS. The eighth tab down on the left in BASIS will take you to a list of [Legislative Information Offices](#). From there, you can click on a specific LIO and get information on the location, phone number, email address, office hours, parking information, and legislators for that office.

Gavel to Gavel

Gavel to Gavel is an independent source for audio and video of legislative hearings, floor sessions, and press conferences. Audio and video of legislative hearings are available in BASIS, but Gavel to Gavel is the only source for audio and video of floor sessions and press conferences.

Website homepage: www.360north.org

House & Senate Majority & Minority News Releases

The House and Senate Majorities and Minorities all have press officers, and they are a good source for current legislative news through their press releases. They send out announcements when legislation is introduced or passed, on press conferences, and sometimes when legislation is scheduled for a hearing or moved from committee.

To contact press officers or to get on email distribution list, scroll down to the bottom of any page on BASIS and on the right are links to caucus websites.

Individual Legislator Newsletters

Many legislators send out newsletters regularly. The most detailed newsletter I've seen is Rep. Paul Seaton's weekly newsletter, and if you only subscribe to one, I recommend his. Of course, you will probably want to subscribe to your own legislators' newsletters.

To access a legislator's newsletters, go to the page of the caucus they belong to and click on a legislator's name to view their newsletters.

Social Media

Twitter is the most useful social media platform for tracking up-to-the-minute legislative information. Journalists often post during hearings, press conferences, and floor sessions, and legislative staff and legislators also post regularly.

One way to follow specific topics on Twitter is to use hashtags (#). The hashtag for following the Alaska State Legislature is **#akleg**. You can also subscribe to curated lists that people put together. I've put together lists of legislators, staff, and legislative reporters, which aggregates all tweets from the people on the list.

The nice thing about Twitter is it's what's known as a microblogging platform. Posts are limited to 140 characters, which means you can scroll through all the #akleg tweets and get up to speed with what's going on very quickly – no unnecessary verbiage here!

Me

I am also happy to help you find information you are having trouble tracking down. Maybe there's a report on such-and-such that you remember being presented in the House Education Committee, but you can't remember which day it was presented and can't find it in BASIS. I am happy to help you find that report! ☺ Just email or phone me at alaskaeducationupdate@gmail.com, shana@alaskaeducationupdate.com, or 907-500-7069.

The Budget Process

Any legislation with a fiscal impact, including the governor's proposed operating and capital budgets, is referred to the finance committees. The finance committees are the last committee of referral for legislation. This means that if legislation has committee referrals in addition to finance, it goes to those committees first. Bills that are solely budget bills are referred only to the finance committees.

Although the governor's budgets are introduced concurrently in both the house and the senate, it is always the house version of the operating and mental health budgets, and the senate version of the capital budget that are passed.

The finance subcommittees review the governor's operating budget requests for each state agency and then make a report to the full finance committee with changes they have made to the governor's budget requests. The finance committee then usually accepts most of the recommendations of the subcommittees, but will change some items. Eventually, a version of each budget (operating, capital, mental health, and supplemental) will make it to the floor of the house and the senate, where additional amendments may be made.

The house and senate pass different versions of each budget. The legislation will then go to a conference committee to negotiate a final bill. The conference committee will put together their own committee substitute when the members come to agreement on all the items in the budget. The house and the senate then vote to adopt the conference committee substitute. Once the house and senate pass the same version of a budget, it is sent to the governor, who then has the option to make partial or total line item vetoes.

The 24-Hour Rule

When the operating budget (always the house version) passes in the senate, it will be returned to the house for concurrence (a fancy way for the senate to say, "We know you will just love what we did with this thing"). I can guarantee you the house will not concur with the senate amendments to the bill.

The house will then send the bill back to the senate, asking them to recede from their amendments (a fancy way for the house to say, "No thank you, we like our bill better; vote for our bill"). I can guarantee you that will not happen either.

At that point, a conference committee consisting of three members of the House Finance Committee and three members of the Senate Finance Committee will be appointed. The conference committee always consists of the co-chairs of each committee and a minority member of each committee.

Once the conference committee for the operating budget is appointed, under [Uniform Rule 23 \(d\)](#) committee chairmen are only required to give 24-hour notice to hear a bill. That is the 24-hour Rule, and things speed up considerably at that point. Even without the 24-Hour Rule in place, bills that have already been heard in committee or scheduled for a hearing can be taken up at any point in the future under "Bills previously heard/scheduled." Toward the end of session, things begin moving really fast, and often members of the public and the press don't hear about a piece of legislation being heard in committee until after the fact.