

Some talk, but won't hold the line

We've reached the end of the Legislative session and have learned the same hard lesson we learn every year. There are many politicians who talk good about what they'll do, but when push comes to shove they won't do what's right. Let's go over what happened recently in Juneau.

Alaska is in the middle of the virus scare; businesses are being shut down and many people are out of work. The governor asked the Legislature to pay back some of the PFD money that wasn't paid in the past to help out the people of Alaska. On March 23, the Senate refused to pay back any of the money owed by one vote, but Sen. Mike Shower was able to get an amendment passed for a \$1,000 stimulus check in the spring (the PFD in the fall had already been cut down to 22% of the Earnings Reserve withdrawal, \$1,000). The vote was 12-7, but one senator changed her mind but wasn't allowed to revote, so really it was 11-8.

The House refused to give any stimulus or larger PFD, though it made sure to increase the budget for government. A conference committee was called between the two, and three of the RINOs — Republican-in-name-only — and one of the Democrats voted to yank that \$1,000 stimulus check out. So don't expect any help from the state.

It's actually much worse than that. They put a poison pill in the Conference Committee bill substitute that said if the conservatives didn't vote for the funding to come out of the Constitutional Budget Reserve, then not only would the PFD be cut in half to \$500 but they also wouldn't fund the coronavirus response money. That's right, they gambled and blackmailed over your lives. It was the cruelest, most malicious thing I've ever seen come out of Juneau, and that's saying a lot. Senate and House leadership led by Bryce Edgmon, Steve Thompson, Cathy Giessel, John Coghill and Click Bishop were instrumental in making that deal with the devil.

The usual response in a rational environment would be that when it got back to the Senate, those who voted for the stimulus would vote no on concurrence with the substitute, and they'd have to go back to negotiations. What happened was the all-too-usual thing in Juneau: Three of the senators — Peter Micchiche from the Kenai Peninsula and Josh Revak from Anchorage, both of whom voted against paying back the PFD, and David Wilson from the Mat-Su — changed their stands on this and voted for concurrence.

In the House, the Democrat-led majority easily passed the concurrence vote. It was questionable whether the House would give into blackmail, since just three days earlier it had put out a press release saying that it committed to protecting the Constitutional Budget Reserve. When the dust settled, the blackmailers had got exactly the 30 votes they needed. All of the Republicans from Fairbanks in the House and the Senate voted for this monstrosity. Oh, it gets worse. The vote didn't just tap the last of the money in the CBR, it also stopped a "reverse sweep" from happening that would have put money from state accounts (slush funds) back into the CBR.

They just passed the largest budget in Alaska history.

Two years ago we changed out 25% of the Legislature, and it looks like we're not done yet. On critical issues in the last two years we were always within a small margin of votes, many times just one vote. I would like to encourage those who are tired of our Legislature spending our future into the grave to step up. Many of those incumbents need an opponent to remind them that the people still care about what is going on and hold their feet to the fire. Alaskans need people there who really care about them.