

Legislature passes spending limit

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With the threat of having pet district capitol improvement projects vetoed, a state constitutional spending limit was approved by the State Legislature this week.

The State Legislature worked into the early morning hours Wednesday in a tug of war to gather the necessary 27 votes to place a constitutional amendment calling for the spending limit before the public. The State Senate passed the measure by 16-4 vote early Wednesday. But house leaders found they were one vote shy of the necessary 23 votes required to call a constitutional vote.

The spending limit bill, if approved by the public, would set a \$2.5 billion limit as a base for State operation and public works. That amount would be increased annually to keep up with population growth and inflation. The amendment called for 1/3 of the budget to be spent on public works projects.

The spending limit was supported by the coalition of Republicans, Bush Democrats and Libertarians who emerged to control the house after the June 12 coup which toppled State Democrats from power. Those Democrats opposed spending limit for various reasons and, had they stood pat, could have scuttled the bill.

In the end the issue hinged on Gov. Jay Hammond's ability to twist enough arms in the Democratic ranks, to gather the necessary votes. The governor spent Tuesday, the second day of the special house session which he called to deal with the spending limit lobbying house members who were holding out a-

gainst the measure.

Those efforts included the threat - implied or stated - that capitol improvement projects in the districts of the hold outs would be "Red Lined" if the limit did not pass. One such project was the Terror Lake Hydro Electricity Package passed this year for the district of Kodiak Representative Zharoff..

Zharoff was the object of intense pressure through out the day and the 5-hour evening session. He and all the holdouts were called to the Governors office during the day and Zharoff returned during the evening session to hear Hammond's pitch.

Zharoff said after he voted for the spending limit that he had to look out for the Terror Lake project. H. Pappy Moss, Delta Junction, another swing vote, said he personally opposed the limit as proposed but said he changed his mind Tuesday "after hearing from my constituents - especially the Native population."

Moss said he conducted a survey in his district but had not looked at the results until Tuesday, the day of the vote.

He said the survey showed 80% supported a spending limit on the State operations budget - the bureaucracy - and 55% supported a public works spending limit.

Moss said the Tanana Chief's Conference was one of several State Native groups who called him favoring the spending limit.

He said he was therefore puzzled by the statements of Bethel Democrat Tony Vaska who spoke and voted against the measure.

Vaska, the only member of the "Bush Caucus" to vote against feared rural areas would

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not receive public works "concrete and steel" projects if a limit is imposed.

"Before we worked out this limit only 10% of the \$2.5 billion was supposed to be capitol improvement. Now its 1/3... no matter what the budget."

Adams said "I know we will be taken care of. We have good projects in the rural area - water, sewer, housing, education, airports.

"The coalition has stated these types of things are need." He was surprised at Vaska's stand in the matter.

No date has been set for the Statewide vote on the limit.