

# MISERLY BUDGET FOR BUSH

## State 8th Legislature's Tight Fist Leaves Bush Fighting for Programs

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Staff Writer

With the state economy stalled by pipeline delay, the 8th Alaska State Legislature held tight pursestrings on state funds, leaving bush programs fighting to hold their own.

"The legislative interests of the bush," said State Senator Willie Hensley, D-Kotzebue, "was a matter of digging in, not moving forward at all. We did all we could just to retain funds and programs we already had. Any new program which required funding was killed."

"Bi-lingual education was retained. The rural Teacher Training Program was retained. But overall, we're not pleased with the level of support for rural schools. Funds for rural education have plummeted from 15 million a couple of years ago to 9 million this year."

Senate Bill 154, sponsored by Hensley, George Holman, and John Sackett, sought to correct serious inadequacies within the money allocated for fire inspection and safety checks for SOS schools.

"We got a half-million dollars instead of the 2 million we were looking for," said Hensley.

The overall school package, Senate Bill 122, designed to completely eliminate or revamp the State Operated School System, was shelved for further study next session. Legislators did vote to remove the military



**WILLIE HENSLEY**  
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schools from SOS to allow more concentration on rural needs.

A bill to finance a feasibility study for a Yukon River ferry system died, as did a proposal by bush legislator, Frank Ferguson, to require reimbursement for a Yukon-River to the Arctic Ocean road to be paid in full by participants in the trans-Alaska pipeline.

The single most significant piece of legislation may have been SB 39, a bill to regulate entry into commercial fishing. The bill hopes to stabilize the economic distress of fishermen by tighter management of resources, limiting the number of units of gear allowed in a specific area.

While some critics are uncertain whether the bill will, in fact, accomplish this goal, it will be a radical change for the industry.

"The only piece of hunting legislation we got passed," Hensley pointed out, "was the addition of two members to the State Fish and Game Board. Sackett's subsistence hunting bill passed the Senate but did not go through the House, and we'll be looking at it again next session, perhaps with some more revisions."

Hensley introduced a bill to limit professional guides to one hunting area, but the bill also

did not pass. "It was designed to protect game by not allowing high concentration of guides in only a few areas, depleting the game stock completely in certain over-hunted sections of the state." Hensley plans to reintroduce the bill next session.

Alaska State Housing Authority received 21.59 million in funds for construction. The bulk of the money will go to Anchorage projects, and also to Fairbanks, Sitka, and Seward.

"Nothing at all for bush housing," said Hensley.

The legislature turned down a pay raise for state employees, and failed to pass no-fault motor vehicle insurance.

In general, it was a quiet, unspectacular legislative session that reflecting tight budget concerns throughout. "It was very definitely an urban-controlled legislature," Hensley commented, but added, "It's going to become worse before it gets better."

The \$352.9 million budget finally approved by the legislature was only \$4 million dollars less than the governor had requested, but Senate Finance Committee Chairman Committee Chairman Cliff Groh, said, "Any time you come in with a figure lower than the governor's you've had an austere year."