

# FAIRBANKS DAILY NEWS MINER [print](#)

## **Poor turnout: Scheduling conflicts left Alaskans unheard in Juneau**

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### **Editorial**

Once every legislative session, for about a week, the Alaska Legislature almost guarantees it won't been seen in a good light by Alaskans. That's because, during that week, they're not seen much at all.

Almost half the Legislature went to Washington, D.C., this week for the annual Energy Council meeting. The council is a loosely organized association of legislators from energy-producing states and Canadian provinces. They all get together to hear presentations about trends in the energy business. Some Alaska legislators also use the trip to Washington, D.C., to visit other officials and share viewpoints on various issue.

Even if the Energy Council meeting seems a bit over-attended, legislators can legitimately defend its educational value. And, while travel and expenses for last year's trip set the state back almost \$50,000, it's not a terribly expensive educational seminar.

However, legislators do themselves no favors when they allow the trip to interfere with the business back home. That's what happened Wednesday. The House Finance Committee scheduled a full afternoon of public testimony from specific communities around the state, including Fairbanks. But only a handful of legislators were there to listen. The rest either were in D.C. or didn't attend for some other reason.

That's unfortunate. When a committee schedules a hearing to invite testimony from specific areas, it should do so at a time when more than a skeleton crew of legislators can attend. Skipping out makes for bad public relations, if nothing else.

Of course, this is a two-way street. Alaskans should take opportunities to attend such events when invited. That doesn't always happen; people sometimes seem happier to grouse privately than testify up front.

Part of the problem is that it's difficult to schedule everything into the Legislature's 90-day session. If nothing else, attendance at the Finance hearing this week illustrated again why the 90-day session limit should be returned to the 120 days called for by the Constitution.