

# Lawmaker's bill aims to guard Alaska Permanent Fund benefit

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By [Becky Bohrer](#)

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — An Anchorage lawmaker is proposing a constitutional amendment to further protect the Alaska Permanent Fund and the dividend that most Alaskans receive simply for living here.

The proposal, from Democratic Sen. Bill Wielechowski, was among the first wave of bills and resolutions filed ahead of the upcoming legislative session and released on Friday. The legislative session begins Jan. 20.

Other proposals include another attempt to change the makeup of the Alaska Judicial Council, a bill to bar political parties from having ad space in state election pamphlets and measures that would prohibit discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Two bills would do away with daylight savings time.

Wielechowski said his proposed constitutional amendment, which would go to voters if passed by a two-thirds vote of each the House and Senate, would take a potential source of funds off the table as lawmakers grapple with deep budget deficits. But he said that's the point. There are other sources the state can consider, like setting a gross minimum oil tax to better protect the state at low oil prices, Wielechowski said.

Currently, the constitution prohibits the principal of the Permanent Fund from being spent. Wielechowski's proposal would apply to the earnings reserve account, which lawmakers have available to them and from which the dividend is currently drawn.

"It's a permanent fund. It was intended to be there for future generations, to sock away some of our resource wealth so that our kids and grandkids and great-grandkids could enjoy the resource wealth that we have," he said. "And I think as we go deeper and deeper into deficit spending we need to make sure that is protected."

The dividend also is an important part of many Alaskans' income, he said.

Sen. Pete Kelly, R-Fairbanks, is reviving his push to increase the number of non-attorney members on the Alaska Judicial Council. Kelly withdrew a similar proposal last year, saying he probably didn't have the votes needed. The council's

responsibilities include screening applicants for and nominating to the governor candidates for judicial vacancies. The council also evaluates the performance of judges and recommends to voters whether judges should be retained.

Sen. Peter Micciche, R-Soldotna, proposed SB 9, which would repeal provisions allowing political parties to have space in the state election pamphlet. A bill that would repeal those provisions also was introduced in the House.

State law allows political parties to pay for up to two pages of material to be included in the pamphlet, which includes information from the candidates and on ballot measures in a given election. One of the pages paid for by the state Republican Party in last year's general election pamphlet took aim at then-U.S. Sen. Mark Begich, saying the Democrat's record showed his loyalties were with President Barack Obama.

Begich said he had never seen something like that in the pamphlet before.

Micciche said he's a fairly loyal Republican and this isn't a party issue for him. He said many constituents felt strongly the bombardment of ads, mailings and other materials during the last election cycle was enough and the pamphlet "should be relatively politically pure."

The amount of revenue received for placement of party material was about 1 percent of the cost of producing the pamphlet, Micciche said, and in his view "not worth making voters feel somewhat jaded that even the election pamphlet has the potential to be influenced."

The anti-discrimination bills are among those that lawmakers are reviving after failed previous attempts to get them passed. Several Democrats and at least one Republican are sponsors.

Another example is a bill from Rep. Tammie Wilson, R-North Pole, who introduced a bill, vetoed last year by then-Gov. Sean Parnell, that would make confidential court records in which charges were dismissed by prosecutors, a person was acquitted of all charges filed or a person was acquitted of some charges and others were dismissed.

Parnell, in his veto last August, said a new court rule would help address privacy concerns raised by supporters of the bill, but Wilson said those rules do not go far enough. She said she planned to speak with new Gov. Bill Walker on the issue.