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HJR 8

"An Act proposing amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska limiting appropriations from certain mineral revenue, relating to the balanced budget account, and relating to an appropriation limit."

The largest contributor to our state's unrestricted revenue is also the most volatile component. 85-90 percent of unrestricted revenues for FY '07 through FY'10 will come from oil. Since 1988 Alaska North Slope crude oil production has declined by 64% - from over 2 million barrels per day to under 720 thousand barrels per day. During that same period of time the market price of oil has increased sixfold. We have gone from a significant deficit in FY '03, a $500 million draw on the CBR, to a significant surplus in FY '06 of over $1 billion, back to a projected deficit in FY '09. This makes rational budgeting nearly impossible. HJR 8 provides an appropriation smoothing and limiting mechanism applicable to the wildly fluctuating portion of the budget that is oil revenue.

In recognition of the difficulty in building and balancing our budget in a responsible manner when the price of oil fluctuates, HJR 8 forces the legislature to incorporate its oil revenues into the budget in any given fiscal year on a five-year rolling average, (4 years back and 1 year forward). This averaging would act as a "dampener" to prevent spending sprees when oil prices are high and crashes when oil prices are low.

HJR 8 also establishes a "Balanced Budget Account" in the State Treasury. Any oil and other mineral revenue received by the state in excess of the 5-year average amount referenced above would be deposited into the Balanced Budget Account. This account would not be subject to the Constitutional Budget Reserve sweep, but would be limited to a maximum amount that is equal to the oil and other mineral revenue appropriations for the current fiscal year, plus the immediate preceding fiscal year. Any excess amount would be transferred to the Constitutional Budget Reserve.

This resolution would also provide for transfer of funds from the Balanced Budget Account into appropriations during years when actual revenue from oil and other minerals falls below the 5-year average. In lean years, the legislature may with a majority vote transfer funds from the Balanced Budget Account necessary to fill the "gap" between the revenue available and the 5-year average. If the legislature requires appropriations above what the 5-year average permits, it may choose to live within its means or seek funds from other sources of revenue including the CBR.

HJR 8 could end the constant search by the legislature for rat holes in which to stash excess revenues so they can access those funds to balance the budget in the following years, without having to buy the ¾ vote to get funds from the Constitutional Budget Reserve. The resolution also avoids "sacred cows" by having no effect on the permanent fund corpus or the earnings of the Permanent Fund, the Amerada Hess Account or the Permanent Fund Dividend.