

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Mike Shower
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Sponsor Statement SB 152

“An act relating to the convening of the legislature at the capitol and in the Municipality of Anchorage; relating to the location of legislative sessions; and relating to the emergency relocation of functions of state government.”

Senate Bill 152 envisions splitting the legislative sessions between Juneau and Anchorage. The first half of the 2-year session would be held in the Capital City of Juneau. The second half of the session would meet in the City of Anchorage. The idea came from the Alaska Federation of Natives solution to their conflict with competing constituencies. They decided to split their annual conferences between Anchorage and Fairbanks. It has been a resounding success. The citizens of Alaska are frustrated and disillusioned with their representatives hidden from reach in Juneau. Covid has further exasperated this frustration with Canadian travel restrictions and COVID concerns with traveling by air. The capitol was locked down to visitors all session in 2021.

Some major legislative issues seem to be decided with little or no consideration to their constituents wishes. Special interest groups work the capitol to protect their constituencies. Committees often have public testimony with no one that shows up to make comments. Many have simply given up and decided it's not worth their time and money to talk to isolated legislators.

Legislators often come back for brief “town halls” where the public is invited to testify for maybe two or three minutes. Meanwhile back in the halls of Juneau, professional lobbyists are paid six and seven figures to influence legislators with unlimited access and influence. Power is consolidated to a few senior legislators in control of key committees that decide what bills are heard and what bills die, and what they can get for their district to make it happen.

The sponsor believes the best government is local government. Working class people do not have the time and money to meet face to face with their legislators in Juneau during session. If a majority of legislators were living within the community where the session is held at least every two years, they would have no choice but to hear from their neighbors, when they shop in the

grocery store, at the gas station, in local eateries, and in the halls and committee rooms where the legislature is meeting.

Many people that may serve are put off by the thought of moving to Juneau for 3-4 months or longer every year. It narrows down the pool of not only those that serve in office, but their staff. A legislature that is responsive to the will of the people they derive their power from would be a refreshing thing. COVID has exacerbated it even worse. The capitol was locked down all year in 2021.

The goal is not to move the capitol, nor is it the goal to move the primary administrative function of government. The goal is to make lawmakers accessible and thus accountable to their constituents, during the critical last year of the session.

Continuing to keep the legislators sequestered in Juneau during session, where the only real access is an expensive airplane ticket and high-cost hotels for a person to show up and visit, allows undue influence to a privileged class of people and their professional lobbyists and the administration.