

**Alaska Library Association
2011 Legislative Report
By Clark Gruening**

Overview

The First Session of the 27th Alaska Legislature adjourned on April 17, just before midnight, as the clock ran out on the 90 day session limit (established by a 2006 voter initiative). The Alaska Constitution sets the session limit at 120 days but many legislators did not want to ignore the voter established limit.

Lacking an agreement between the House and Senate on adjournment, the House passed a resolution requesting the Governor to adjourn the regular session. Governor Parnell adjourned the regular session and immediately called a 30 day special session to be limited to 10 bills, including the operating and capital budget bills.

Three days before the end of the 30 day special session, the major remaining bills were the capital budget (SB 46) and HB 106 to extend the Alaska Coastal Management Program. The House removed a contentious contingency provision in its version of the capital budget and adjourned, leaving the Senate to accept or reject, in total, the amended bill.

The Senate accepted the House changes to the capital budget but the early House adjournment doomed the passage of the Coastal Management Bill. In a second special session held on June 27 and 28 efforts to reauthorize Alaska's Coastal Management Program again failed. Alaska will now be the only coastal state without this program.

The Operating and Capital Budget

The capital budget bill (SB46) together with the Coastal Management bill ended up being a big source of contention between the House and the Senate and between the Governor and the Senate Majority Coalition. The Senate version of the capital budget contained a provision that each and every appropriation in the energy section of SB46 (over 100 energy projects totaling some \$400 million) would have to become law without veto or reduction in order to have any energy project funded.

The "all or nothing" contingency language was designed to dissuade the governor from vetoing or reducing any individual energy projects. Facing the near certainty that constitutional challenges would delay the start of many projects, the Senate signaled it would accept an amendment removing the contingency provision.

With less than 3 days to go in the first special session, the House adjourned forcing the Senate to either accept the House changes to the capital budget or adjourn again without passing a capital budget. The Senate agreed to the House changes and adjourned, finally ending the extended battle over the capital budget.

Governor Parnell acting on his promise to trim the \$3.1 billion capital projects budget vetoed just over \$400 million (\$399 million in state funds and \$16.7 million in federal funds). In contrast, the House and the Senate came to an agreement on the operating budget with relatively little contention by the end of the regular session.

The legislature added \$5 million to the Governor's FY 2012 capital budget for the State Library, Archives and Museum Project (SLAM). The \$5 million and prior appropriations of \$27.45 million will take the project to a completed design and into a foundation construction phase. The remaining funding needed is \$94.5 million provided that all funding is in place by the end of July 2012 and that a foundation package can be awarded by April 2012.

The completed SLAM facility will safely house and protect priceless documents, photographs, artifacts and items of Alaska's peoples, cultures and past. The unified facility will give Alaskans and others both physical and digital access to a vast collection.

The final version of FY12 capital budget also included funding of \$16.9 million for the four highest ranked projects under the Public Library Construction and Major Expansion Matching Grant Program. The four library projects are Ketchikan, Kodiak, Skagway and Soldotna.

The Public Library Construction and Major Expansion Matching Grant Program (AS 14.56.355) and Public School Library Collection Grant Program (AS 14.56.360) were both established by the passage of SB119 in 2008. The Alaska Library Association supported the passage of SB 119 and supports the annual funding of both programs in this legislation. The Public Library Construction and Major Expansion Matching Grant Program received its first funding last year in the FY 11 capital budget for public libraries projects in Cordova, Kenai, Sutton, Barrow, Petersburg, and Seward.

The Public School Library Collection Grant Program (AS 14.56.360) is intended to be funded through the operating budget and has established regulations but has received no funding to date. The annual state operating budget also funds the other programs and services provided through the Alaska State library. The legislature funded these programs at the level requested by the Governor.