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**Wednesday, November 5, 2014**

**Senate Majority Organizes**

On Wednesday, November 5, one day after the general election, the Senate Majority held a press conference to announce their leadership positions.

Sen. Kevin Meyer began by congratulating those who were elected and introducing the 14 members of the majority for the 29<sup>th</sup> Alaska State Legislature, which begins on January 20, 2015. Sen. Meyer will be the president.

**The majority consists of the 14 Republicans in the senate:**

- Click Bishop
- John Coghill
- Mia Costello
- Mike Dunleavy
- Anna Fairclough
- Cathy Giessel
- Charlie Huggins
- Pete Kelly
- Lesil McGuire
- Kevin Meyer
- Peter Micciche
- Bert Stedman
- Gary Stevens
- Bill Stoltze

## **Leadership:**

**Senate President:** Sen. Meyer

**Majority Leader:** Sen. Coghill

**Community & Regional Affairs:** Sen. Bishop

**Education:** Sen. Dunleavy

**Finance Co-chairs:** Sen. Fairclough Sen. Kelly

Members: Sens. Bishop, Dunleavy, Micciche, and others to be announced at a later date

**Health & Social Services:** Sen. Stedman

**Judiciary:** Sen. McGuire

**Labor & Commerce:** Sen. Costello

**Legislative Council:** Sen. Stevens

**Resources:** Sen. Giessel

**Rules:** Sen. Huggins

**State Affairs:** Sen. Stoltze

**Transportation:** Sen. Micciche

President Meyer said they will finalize majority goals and standing committee membership at a retreat in December. They have not yet determined which majority members will be on individual committees. He said some of the topics they've already discussed are revenue and budgets, budget sustainability, making gradual budget reductions while keeping the economy strong, and in-state gas including a gas pipeline.

Sen. Huggins said Tuesday night the state benefited from people voting. They are looking to cooperate and move the state forward. The budget, affordable energy, and the gas pipeline are challenges they will face. They will work on those issues to benefit Alaskans.

President Meyer said everyone was up late and they are looking forward to spending time with their families and relaxing, and getting ready for session.

Sen. Giessel said she will work hard as the Resources Committee chair, and making sure they have an educated workforce for resource projects.

## **The majority then took questions from reporters.**

Regarding a question on whether they've talked to Democrats who caucused with the majority this last session, President Meyer said Democrats have not yet been invited to caucus with the majority, but they are having conversations with them. *[It's likely that one of the Democrats will caucus with the Republicans, as it would be beneficial to both the majority and the minority: the majority would then have a three-fourths majority for voting, and the Democrats would gain an extra seat on the Finance Committee.]*

In response to a question about whether senators had to make a pledge, or what guidelines there were to join the majority, President Meyer said nothing's different than in the past – members just need to support the budget that comes out of the Senate Finance Committee and agree to support procedural votes.

When asked why the majority was organized along party lines, President Meyer said it was not necessary to organize differently since there were 14 Republicans. They work well with Democrats and are having discussions with them.

Sen. Huggins said just because someone is a Democrat and aren't in the majority doesn't mean they aren't working together. Sen. Micciche noted that they started with a single party in the majority this past legislature and then added Democrats to the majority. He said it would be the same process this year.

When asked about Ballot Measure 2, regulating marijuana like alcohol, President Meyer said they had a preliminary discussion on that, but it will be a big issue for the Judiciary, Administrative Regulation Review, Senate Finance, and Health & Social Services committees. He said it was too early to discuss the issue. They were all shocked and surprised by the vote on Ballot measure 2 and need to look at what's worked in other states. Sen. Coghill said Ballot Measure 2 gives more authority to the administration than the legislature, so input from the Administrative Regulation Review Committee will be significant. They will give the issue thorough hearings so people know what was passed. He said the majority will also focus on the Arctic Council. Alaska is an international place of investment and they have a lot of assets that are marketable, and the legislature wants to make sure the rules to move forward are easy to work with. Sen. Giessel said they will be working about how marijuana will impact people's health, including mental health.

In response to a question on how they make decisions for who will be in leadership positions, President Meyer said they try to put the most qualified people in the right positions. He said Sen. Huggins (the current senate president) has done a good job talking to people over the interim to find out where they would like to be. They then voted on leadership positions. Sen. Huggins added that leadership choices are made on strength, motivation, and the number of people in the majority.

When asked if there was any interest in revisiting the provisions of SB 21, President Meyer said SB 21 is bringing in more revenue at low oil prices. Sen. Giessel said they have a review committee in place for that issue.

Sen. Kelly said the budget will be a big issue. They have to maintain reserves to get to

the point in the future when they have gas revenue.

Regarding education funding, Sen. Fairclough said education funding is a good opportunity to step forward and work together. School boards need to look internally. The school in her area is being looked at for closure, and that is not going to happen. They need to get numbers on the table and look at cost drivers. They didn't come together, and they need to have a dialogue about the actual facts.

When asked if they discussed how to work with Bill Walker if he becomes governor, and whether Medicaid will be expanded, President Meyer said it doesn't matter who the governor is; they will work together with the administrative branch. He noted that the governor can do expand Medicaid with executive order.