



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

Legislative leaders examine veto override option *Letter seeks to preserve state's options for federal stimulus funds*

Wednesday, June 3, 2009, Anchorage, Alaska – Legislative leaders today sent a letter to U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu, looking to preserve the state's option to receive \$28.56 million in federal economic stimulus funding for energy-efficiency projects. Gov. Sarah Palin last month vetoed the legislative appropriation of State Energy Program funds.

Lawmakers asked the Energy Secretary if he would hold open the application process until legislators reconvene in January and could consider a veto override. The Alaska Constitution allows a veto override vote during the first five days after lawmakers reconvene on Jan. 19, 2010.

Department of Energy officials last month said they were willing to work with Alaska and would accept a late application for the funding, but did not indicate how long they would wait. Today's letter to Secretary Chu asks if the department would allow the Legislature until January. "We realize this is several months past the May 12 deadline, but we hope you will be willing to accommodate our legislative calendar and grant our request."

House and Senate leaders say legislators also need to know whether a veto override would be useful. They asked the Energy Secretary whether a legislative resolution would be acceptable in lieu of the governor's certification of the application for funding if the Legislature overrides the veto but Gov. Palin refuses to complete the application.

"(We) ask your understanding — and patience — while we resolve an internal disagreement over the funds," the legislators said in their letter, which was signed by Senate President Gary Stevens, House Speaker Mike Chenault, Senate Finance Co-chairs Lyman Hoffman and Bert Stedman, House Finance Co-chairs Mike Hawker and Bill Stoltze, and House Minority Leader Beth Kerttula.

"Alaskans face some of the highest energy costs in the nation. It probably is no surprise to your office that the 680,000 Alaskans have a keen and personal interest in energy-efficiency programs and are always looking for opportunities to reduce heating and lighting costs for their homes and businesses," the lawmakers told Secretary Chu.

The \$28.56 million could be used for building retrofits to increase energy efficiency; loans, grants and incentives for energy efficiency and renewable energy; replacing streetlights with LEDs to save energy; promoting energy-efficiency building standards; or most anything that would reduce heating and lighting costs for Alaskans.

The federal economic stimulus act sets a 2017 goal for states to meet energy-efficiency standards for residential and commercial construction but does not require that states count square footage or enforce the goal. The department has told legislators it will merely require that states prepare and promote a plan for how they could meet adequate energy-efficiency standards.

A copy of the legislators' letter to Secretary Chu is attached.

#

Press contact: Larry Persily, aide to Rep. Hawker; office 465-6959; cell 351-8276.