

LEGAL SERVICES

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MEMORANDUM

June 25, 2019

SUBJECT: Location of a special session (Work Order No. 31-LS1072)

TO: Representative Bryce Edgmon
Speaker of the House
Attn: Amory Lelake

FROM: Megan A. Wallace 
Director

You have asked for a follow-up discussion on the constitutionality of AS 24.05.100(b), requiring the governor to designate the location of a special session if the special session is to be held outside of the capital. AS 24.05.100(b) was enacted by ch. 100, SLA 1982 (HB 185), and it reads as follows:

(b) A special session may be held at any location in the state. If a special session called [by the governor] under (a)(1) of this section is to be convened at a location other than at the capital, the governor shall designate the location in the proclamation. If a special session called [by the legislature] under (a)(2) of this section is to be convened at a location other than at the capital, the presiding officers shall agree to and designate the location in the poll conducted of the members of both houses.

As part of the 1982 HB 185 House Judiciary Bill File, there is a news article that notes, in 1980, some legislators had asked Governor Hammond to consider calling them into special session in Anchorage. At the time, Attorney General Condon told the governor that the special session should happen in Juneau because there would be legal questions as to whether the legislature could convene outside the capital. The article also notes that the laws enacted during the territorial days specified that any legislative session must be in the capital. Based on this part of the legislative record and in listening to the committee hearings on HB 185 in 1982, it seems evident to me that in enacting AS 24.05.100(b), the legislature did not contemplate a scenario, like here, where the governor would designate a location in a special session proclamation absent an agreement with the legislature.¹

¹ This scenario is unprecedented. A governor has never called the legislature into a special session in a location other than in Juneau. All three special sessions that have occurred in Anchorage were initiated by the legislature.

As we previously discussed, it is very possible a court could find the mandate in AS 24.05.100(b), that the governor designate the location of a special session called outside the capital, unconstitutional because (1) it goes beyond the constitutional power granted the governor to call a special session under art. II, sec. 9, Constitution of the State of Alaska; (2) the legislature must meet in the capital unless it is impossible to do so under art. XV, sec. 20; or (3) the location of a special session is a matter that can be ultimately decided only by the legislature under the separation of powers doctrine. Regardless of the legal theory, this issue would be one of first impression for a court in this state.

1. The constitution is silent as to the location of a special session called by the governor.

While the governor is statutorily required under AS 24.05.100(b) to designate the location of a special session if outside the capital, the governor does not have the constitutional power to compel the legislature to meet in a location other than the capital. Article II, sec. 9, Constitution of the State of Alaska provides:

Special sessions may be called by the governor or by vote of two-thirds of the legislators. The vote may be conducted by the legislative council or as prescribed by law. At special sessions called by the governor, legislation shall be limited to subjects designated in his proclamation calling the session, to subjects presented by him, and the reconsideration of bills vetoed by him after adjournment of the last regular session. Special sessions are limited to thirty days.

The constitution gives the governor the power to call the legislature into special session and to limit the subjects to those presented by the governor. The Alaska Supreme Court has previously narrowly construed shared executive and legislative powers under the constitution. After finding that the appointment of executive officers is an executive function and that confirmation by the legislature of the appointees is a specific attribute of the appointive power of the executive,² the Court held, art. III, secs. 25 and 26 of the Constitution marked the full reach of the delegated, or shared, appointive function to Alaska's legislative branch of government.³

Based on that reasoning, a court could similarly conclude that the location of the legislative sessions is a matter of legislative power, and that art. II, sec. 9, sets out the full limit of the governor's power to call the legislature into special session; namely the power to call the legislature in and limit the subjects considered in that session. Any attempt by the governor to designate and compel a location other than the capital would be beyond the powers granted to the governor by the constitution.

² *Brander v. Hammond*, 553 Pd.D. 1 (Alaska 1976).

³ *Id.* at 6 - 7.

2. The Legislature must meet in the capital unless it is impossible to do so.

Article XV, sec. 20 of the state constitution states that "[t]he capital of the State of Alaska shall be at Juneau." It is clear that a state capital is the seat of government for that state. Very simply, that is what the word "capital" means.⁴ When a seat of government has been established, the principal officers of the executive branch are usually obligated to keep their offices there.⁵ Likewise, inherent in the concept of "seat of government" is the requirement that the legislative power be exercised at that place.⁶ While provisions may be made for the conduct of legislative sessions outside of the seat of government, this is frequently limited to situations where it is impossible for the legislature to meet there — in cases of war, insurrection, or natural disaster.⁷

The position that the legislature is obligated to exercise its power in the seat of government under Alaska's constitution is reinforced by the discussion of the constitutional delegates in considering art. XV, sec. 20. The delegates were not in agreement about whether that provision, if adopted into the state constitution, would fix the capital at Juneau as a matter of constitutional law or whether this designation could thereafter be amended statutorily. In considering the alternative of not listing a capital at all in the new constitution, the immediate concern that arose was the question of where the first legislative session would be held if no capital were named.⁸ While the delegates never reached agreement as to what the effect of art. XV, sec. 20 would be on the question of a possible future capital move, it is clear the delegates felt they had to make some provision for a seat of government precisely so that the location for the holding of legislative sessions would be fixed. In short, the delegates intended that "capital" would describe the place where legislative sessions were held.

The Alaska Supreme Court, in considering whether the capital could be moved from Juneau by law concluded that it could, whether the law were adopted by initiative or enactment of the legislature itself.⁹ Amendment of the constitution is not required to

⁴ See *State ex rel Gomez v. Campbell*, 400 P.2d 956 (N.M. 1965).

⁵ 81A C.J.S. States 78; *State v. Langlie*, 273 P.2d 464 (Wash. 1954).

⁶ 81A C.J.S. States 78; See also *Opinion of Justices*, 476 So.2d 611 (Ala. 1985); *Taylor v. Beckham*, 56 S.W. 177 (Ky. 1900).

⁷ See *Taylor*, 56 S.W. at 179.

⁸ *Proceedings of the Alaska Constitutional Convention*, Part 4, page 3020.

⁹ *Starr v. Hagglund*, 374 P.2d 316 (Alaska 1962). Note that in deciding that the capital can be moved by law, the court appears to have foreclosed the possibility that the legislature may designate the capital as a matter of procedure.

accomplish a capital move. That does not, however, mean that legislative sessions do not have to be held in the capital, but only that the capital may be changed by law.

In short, based on the fact that the state constitution designates Juneau as the capital (until changed by law) and the delegates' intention that the term "capital" as used in art. XV, sec. 20, means the place where the legislature is to meet, it may be that neither the governor nor the legislature has the power to designate a location outside of Juneau for a legislative session unless holding the session in the capital is impossible.¹⁰

3. The location of a special session is a matter that can be decided only by the legislature.

While the governor is required by statute to designate the location of a special session if it is to be held outside of the capital, the authority to compel the legislature to meet there is a separate legal question. Assuming that a legislative session may be held outside the state capital, the question remains as to whether the doctrine of separation of powers prevents the governor from designating, and enforcing that designation, of a location of a special session, particularly without agreement of the legislature and when at odds with the legislative needs and will.

Article II, sec. 12 of the state constitution states that "the houses of each legislature shall adopt uniform rules of procedure." Based on this grant of authority, Alaska's Supreme Court has held that the legislature is not bound to comply with statutes that deal with matters within the rule-making power of the legislature and that (except as necessary to enforce constitutional rights or requirements) the courts will not, due to the doctrine of separation of powers, provide a remedy for violations of legislative rules.¹¹ If the doctrine of separation of powers generally prevents the courts from interfering in matters of legislative procedure, then it should certainly prevent the governor from interfering in matters of legislative procedure.¹²

¹⁰ This does not necessarily mean that legislation adopted at a session held outside the capital would be invalid. That issue involves other considerations and is not addressed in this memorandum.

¹¹ *Abood v. League of Women Voters*, 743 P.2d 333 (Alaska 1987) ("[I]t is the legislature's prerogative to make, interpret and enforce its own procedural rules and the judiciary cannot compel the legislature to exercise a purely legislative prerogative."); see also *Malone v. Meekins*, 650 P.2d 351 (Alaska 1982) (holding that convening of a session by a person other than the presiding officer contrary to statute was a matter of internal legislative procedure). Accord *Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure*, sec. 15 (2010 ed.).

¹² The fact that a previous legislature authorized this interference by enacting a statute does not matter. "The body at its preceding meetings does not have the power to bind its successors or to put shackles on it that might be cast off only in a particular way." *Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure*, sec. 15 (2010 ed.)

No Alaska court has considered whether the location of a single legislative session is a matter of legislative procedure, although it is clear that venue is a procedural matter in the context of the judiciary.¹³ Certainly, the court might be willing to accept the proposition that the place the legislature convenes is procedural, much like questions of venue are procedural for purposes of litigation.¹⁴ On the other hand, *Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure*, sec. 705 (2010 ed.) suggests that the location of a session is a matter of law rather than procedure: "When the place of meeting of a legislative body has been designated by law, it may be changed only on legal authority, and no valid meeting can be held nor business conducted at any other than the legally designated place."

Even if the location of the session is not a matter of procedure governed by art. II, sec. 12, Constitution of the State of Alaska, other considerations raise the possibility of a violation of separation of powers if the governor designates the location of a special session against the interests of the legislature. The legislature must provide for and pay for the infrastructure and staff necessary for it to accomplish its business, which may be easier to accomplish in some locations than in others. The legislature's administrative power—its power to provide for chambers, meeting rooms, staff, offices, telephones, voting machines, networking, security, and other necessary services—is essential to its functioning as an independent branch of government. To preserve the legislature's independence, a court may ultimately find it a violation of the separation of powers doctrine to give the governor the power to establish the location of a legislative session.

Any decision as to where to convene this special session will ultimately require a balance of the litigation risks with the need to preserve the legislature's independence and resources in determining the location of its sessions.

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¹³ *Morrison v. Steiner*, 290 N.E.2d 841 (Ohio 1972). See Rule 3, Alaska Rules of Civil Procedure.

¹⁴ Even assuming that the court were to agree that the place the legislature convenes is a matter of procedure, that does not mean that the legislature may determine the location of holding a session under its rule-making power because that power is subordinate to other specific rules contained in the state constitution, including the designation of a capital in art. XV, sec. 20. *Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure*, sec. 10(3) (2010 ed.)