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LAWMAKERS: The governor's plan may not fare better than before.

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JUNEAU -- Gov. Frank Murkowski hopes public pressure and the lure of a major bond package will persuade lawmakers to accomplish in a special session what they did not address in their regular session: a long-term fix for the state's chronic budget problems.

But key lawmakers doubt the governor will have any more luck getting his plan through the Legislature now than he did during the regular session. The special session starts today.

Murkowski said he's been traveling around the state, talking about the need for a fiscal fix, and more than 90 percent of Alaskans tell him they want something done.

"So I would hope the legislators would get the message that the people of Alaska want a solution now," Murkowski said Monday.

The governor wants lawmakers to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot this fall that would change the way the annual payout from the \$27.8 billion Alaska Permanent Fund is calculated. The amendment calls for some of the fund's earnings to be spent on state and local government and guarantees a dividend payment to individual Alaskans of at least \$1,000 for the next 10 years.

Senate Finance Committee co-chairman Gary Wilken, R-Fairbanks, said Monday he does not like the new proposal any better than the Permanent Fund constitutional amendment he voted against during the regular session.

"I'm perplexed as to why we need to be doing this, unless somebody has changed lots of minds," Wilken said.

He disagrees with Murkowski that legislators need to do anything.

Wilken said the state can and should fill any budget gaps it has in the next several years by using a combination of Permanent Fund earnings and the state's \$2 billion constitutional budget reserve.

Doing that would require no legislation. Lawmakers can already use fund earnings to pay for government, though they have been reluctant to do so for fear of the political consequences.

Senate Minority Leader Johnny Ellis, D-Anchorage, said he's also not optimistic that lawmakers will agree on a plan.

Some Republican legislators oppose Murkowski's idea to guarantee a dividend in the constitution.

But some Democrats contend the governor's proposal does not reserve enough for

dividends in the constitution. Ellis said it needs to be more than 50 percent of the annual payout from the fund.

Putting a constitutional amendment on the ballot requires a two-thirds vote in both the House and Senate, which is a steep hurdle.

Getting those votes could be made even more difficult because some legislators may not make it to the session.

House Majority Leader John Coghill said three House members -- Peggy Wilson of Wrangell, Hugh "Bud" Fate of North Pole and Cheryl Heinze of Anchorage -- may miss part of the session because of their own or family illnesses.

Rep. Kelly Wolf, R-Kenai, said last week he would not show up because he thinks the session is a waste of time.

But Coghill said Monday that Wolf is now saying he will attend, though he may not be in Juneau until Wednesday. Wolf did not return a phone call to his Kenai office Monday afternoon.

Murkowski said if lawmakers don't like what he's come up with, he's open to other proposals.

He's also left open the option of an advisory ballot being put to voters. A decision to do that would require only a simple majority vote from legislators.

But some legislators fear voters would simply say no, as they did on a Permanent Fund advisory vote in 1999, and that essentially would put fund earnings off-limits to the Legislature for several years.

Murkowski's special session agenda also includes a \$115.7 million bond package, which includes transportation and university projects. The governor said he will sign off on that bill if legislators come up with a solution to the fiscal gap.

Some lawmakers, however, said having projects paid for by state bonds in their districts would not entice them to vote for the Permanent Fund constitutional amendment.

"It has no bearing," Wilken said. "I have not had one person ask me about a bond issue."

Murkowski also wants lawmakers to approve a constitutional spending limit, vote on a \$1-per-pack increase in the state's tax on cigarettes and approve a bill changing how workers' compensation appeals are handled.