

Mary K. Hughes
1592 Coffey Lane
Anchorage, AK 99501
mkhughes@alaska.edu

March 14, 2015

Representative Lynn Gattis
State Capitol Room 500
Juneau, AK 99801

via email: Rep.Lynn.Gattis@akleg.gov

Re: HB 107 – Composition of the Board of Regents

Dear Representative Gattis:

A hearing has been scheduled on the above-captioned bill for Wednesday, March 18. I, unfortunately, am away from home and therefore cannot testify in person. I would like my letter to suffice and be entered into the record.

Your office received on February 24, pursuant to your request, the comments of the University of Alaska Board of Regents on HB 107. Since we speak as an entire board through our chair, it is unusual for a single regent to provide testimony. At the request of our Chair Jo Heckman, I do so in support of the Board's aforementioned letter.

I have been a member of the UA Board of Regents since 2002. I was appointed by then-Governor Tony Knowles when the Legislature failed to confirm the appointment of Mark Begich. The timing of the appointment necessitated then-Governor Frank Murkowski to submit my name to the Legislature for confirmation. He did so. I was re-appointed by then-Governor Sarah Palin in 2009. During my tenure, there has been one appointed regent not confirmed by the Legislature and one sitting regent resign as a result of a criminal indictment against him. Each circumstance involved gubernatorial and legislative discussions with the Board, eventually culminating in an agreed upon resolution.

I relate the twelve history of "regent appointment" while I've been on the Board to demonstrate the ability of the Governor, Legislature and the Board to move forward without legislation. The University and the Board is part of Alaska's Constitution; the framers were very specific in their verbiage in Article 7:

§ 2. State University

The University of Alaska is hereby established as the state university and constituted a body corporate. It shall have title to all real and personal property now or hereafter set aside for or conveyed to it. Its property shall be administered and disposed of according to law.

§ 3. Board of Regents

The University of Alaska shall be governed by a board of regents. The regents shall be appointed by the governor, subject to confirmation by a majority of the members of the legislature in joint session. The board shall, in accordance with law, formulate policy and appoint the president of the university. He shall be the executive officer of the board.

Over the years, the only specific “regent appointment” legislation I can recall is the creation of a student regent.

I was fortunate to have been born on Kodiak Island, raised in Anchorage, educated at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks and, with the exception of attending law school, not absent from the state for very long. Given my Alaskan roots, I’ve always considered myself an Alaskan (as do many of us). That being said, while I applaud the Legislative’s careful consideration of the appointment of regents, I do not consider where I reside within the state a criteria for service on the Board of Regents. As a matter of fact, Regent Fuller Cowell, who just completed his exemplary service on the Board in February, was raised in Fairbanks; when he returned to Alaska, lived in Anchorage and Big Lake; and now resides in Fairbanks. I know several former Regents, and many Alaskans, who reside in two or more regions of the state and are extremely proud to do so. In my case, under the HB 107, to return to reside on Kodiak Island, the place of my birth, would deprive me of service on the Board. The consequences would be unfair to me and perhaps unfair to, and certainly a legal quagmire for, the University of Alaska.

Since as Alaskans we are few, we need to embrace unity and collaboration in all we do. The UA Board of Regents has done just that for the twelve years which I’ve served on the Board. During that dozen years, the Board has consisted of many Alaskans, all striving to serve the State of Alaska and provide the very best of post-secondary education to all Alaskans. A restriction of appointments based upon residency within specific regions of the State implies that we are not serving Alaskans well and that a region-based appointment system would better educate Alaskans. I respectfully disagree.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Yours very truly,

Mary K. Hughes

Mary K. Hughes