SESSION ADDRESS:
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
(907) 465-4925
Fax: (907) 465-3517
Toll Free: 1-800-821-4925

Senator Gary Stevens

Alaska State Legislature

INTERIM ADDRESS:
305 Center Ave, Ste. 1
Kodiak, Alaska 99615
(907) 486-4925
Fax: (907) 486-5264

SPONSOR STATEMENT

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 1

"Relating to a Legislative Task Force on Civics Education."

SCR 1 creates a task force to carefully examine and improve awareness of the importance of civics education in our state. What is the condition of civics education in Alaska? What are other states doing? Given Alaska's current budget climate, how can we improve our approach to civics education in Alaska without adding to the cost of delivering it? These are questions worth exploring.

While most Americans agree on the importance of preparing young people for citizenship in a democracy, civic education has received less and less attention in schools over the past couple of decades. During that time, schools have focused their attention first on preparing students for college and jobs, and more recently on responding to increasing accountability demands, primarily in mathematics, reading, and writing. Experts believe a decline in civic engagement, such as the decline in voting rates among young voters since 18-year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972, may be a direct result of the decrease in emphasis placed on civics.

In one response to this decline in civic engagement, most states developed content standards in civics or government in the 1990s and early 2000s to ensure that students acquired a basic understanding of how government works, of the documents on which American democracy is based, and of basic democratic values. Unlike state efforts to improve instruction in the core academic disciplines, however, most states have not established statewide assessments aligned with their civics standards. A number of states recently have established legislative committees or task forces to examine their civic education practices and make recommendations to the legislature, the state education agency, and their public schools.

While many individuals and organizations have sought to address the poor condition of civic education, the problem remains acute. Strong state policies are needed to establish and reinforce the fact that preparation for civic life is equally as important as, and important for, preparation for higher education and careers. In fact, preparation for active citizenship was a foundational principle of public education in America from its beginning, and it is a principle that must be reaffirmed by each generation.

By passing SCR 1, Alaska will join in with other states in an effort to restore attention to the importance of civics education in our schools.

I appreciate your consideration of this legislation.

Senate District R
Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov