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Senator Gary Stevens

SENATE BILL 72 *Civics Education in Alaska Schools*

SPONSOR STATEMENT

SB 72 is intended to improve awareness of the importance of civics education in Alaska.

While most Americans agree on the importance of preparing young people for citizenship in a democracy, civics education has received diminishing attention in schools over the past couple of decades. There has been a gradual paradigm shift in preparing students first for college and jobs, responding to increasing accountability demands, and heavy emphasis on 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. Coupled with the present day political climate we are observing, many are calling for a return to civility.

One response to this decline in civic engagement, has been for states to develop content standards in civics or government, which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was an effort to ensure students have a basic understanding of the fundamentals of how our government works, of the documents on which American democracy is based, and of basic democratic values. Notwithstanding state efforts to improve instruction in the core academic disciplines, states should also establish statewide assessments aligned with their civics standards.

While many individuals and organizations have sought to address the poor condition of civics 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 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 SB 72, Alaska will join with other states in an effort to restore attention to the importance of civics education in our schools, and ultimately in steadying civic engagement within our country.

I appreciate your consideration of this legislation.