

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 25, 2001

8:10 a.m.

EDUCATION MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Con Bunde, Chair
Representative Brian Porter
Representative Joe Green
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Gary Stevens
Representative Reggie Joule
Representative Gretchen Guess

EDUCATION MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Fred Dyson
Representative John Coghill
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Gary Stevens
Representative Reggie Joule
Representative Sharon Cissna

HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Vic Kohring

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Confirmation Hearings:

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Georgia Sue Cast - Bethel
Patricia Truman - Palmer
Cynthia Curran - Juneau

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

Board of Education & Early Development

Diane Heard - Eagle River

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

GEORGIA SUE CAST, Appointee
to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission
PO Box 1646
Bethel, Alaska 99559

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

PATRICIA TRUMAN, Appointee
to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission
125 West Evergreen
Palmer, Alaska 99645

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

DIANE HEARD, Appointee
to the Board of Education & Early Development
9633 Krishka Circle
Eagle River, Alaska 99577

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Board of Education & Early Development.

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Appointee
to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission
(No address provided)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-30, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR CON BUNDE called the joint meeting of the House Special Committee on Education and the House Health, Education & Social Services Standing Committee to order at 8:10 a.m. Present at the call to order from the House Special Committee on Education were Representatives Bunde, Porter, Green, Stevens, Guess, and Wilson. Representative Joule joined the meeting while it was in progress. Members present from the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee were Representatives Dyson, Wilson, Stevens, and Coghill. Representatives Joule and Cissna joined the meeting while it was in progress. [The minutes for HB 239, HB 171, HB 218, and SB 86 are found in the 8:40 a.m. House Special Committee on Education minutes of the same date.]

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

Professional Teaching Practices Commission Board of Education & Early Development

CHAIR BUNDE announced that the committees would consider the confirmations of Georgia Sue Cast, Patricia Truman, and Cynthia Curran to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, and the confirmation of Diane Heard to the Board of Education & Early Development.

Number 124

CHAIR BUNDE asked Georgia Sue Cast what experiences she has had that would qualify her for a position [on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission].

GEORGIA SUE CAST, Appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified via teleconference. She stated that she has taught since 1980 and this would be her second term on the commission.

CHAIR BUNDE asked why she [wants to be on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission].

MS. CAST responded that she firmly believe that teachers need to have a hand in policing their profession.

CHAIR BUNDE remarked that he couldn't agree more. He said, "If more teachers were to be a little stricter in getting rid of the deadwood, we would be well served."

Number 0219

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON asked what the major issues are that [the Professional Teaching Practices Commission] has dealt with in the past, and what would she like to see the commission be proactive at investigating in the future.

MS. CAST answered that [the commission members] investigate only what comes across their desks. She stated that there have been a number of contract violations. In those cases, the districts ask for [the teachers'] licenses.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON asked if there has been any pattern of unethical conduct or lack of professional accomplishment and skill, [in the cases that have come before the commission].

MS. CAST answered no. She stated that the non-fulfillment of teacher contracts has really been the only consistent [issue].

CHAIR BUNDE asked if the recent sexual indiscretions of teachers in the [Matanuska-Susitna] area will come before [the commission], or if [those teachers] will get [fired] before appeal.

MS. CAST responded that she is pretty sure that those teachers have lost their credentials. She stated that [the commission] has not seen [that case] as of yet.

Number 0386

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS asked Ms. Cast if [the commission] is entirely reactive or if it is ever proactive.

MS. CAST replied that it is a matter of reaction. She explained that after a complaint is filed, it is investigated by [the commission's] director. The members then vote on whether they want to follow [the director's] recommendations or if they want [the director] to investigate further.

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS asked what the track record of the commission is - if they generally uphold or overturn recommendations.

MS. CAST responded that it really depends. She stated that things are really "picked apart" by the commission.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON remarked to Ms. Cast and the other candidates, "If, indeed, you believe that we should change the law to allow you to be proactive and not just reactive to the

cases that come before you, I, for one, would sure be glad to hear from you."

Number 0555

PATRICIA TRUMAN, Appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified via teleconference. She stated that she has been teaching in Alaska since 1978 - in the Bush, the Interior, and now in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley - and is Alaska's Teacher of the Year. She said she has been on the commission for about a year and a half, and although it has been more of a reactive group, it is starting to be more proactive. She noted that as teacher of the year, she is able to talk with pre-service teachers and educate them in the behavior that they need to uphold. She added that the commission has been working in the universities, and [the commission] is also beginning to speak with administrators and first-year teachers in districts about the code of ethics.

Number 0727

DIANE HEARD, Appointee to the Board of Education & Early Development, testified via teleconference. She stated that she thinks all Alaskans should take the opportunity to be of some service to their communities and to the state. She said she has been involved in the YWCA of Anchorage; has served on the Anchorage Women's Commission, which provides services to the municipality; and has been appointed by Governor Knowles to the State Board of Education and Early Development. She remarked that she feels this gives her an opportunity to serve the state at a higher level, and to be of some assistance to the fruition of the children of Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN asked what she brings to early childhood development with an educational background in business administration.

MS. HEARD stated:

Well, I used to be a child. ... I think my business background is simply another diverse view that can be brought to the table. I don't believe that the Department of Education and ... Early Development can be fully served if all views come from the same perspective. I'd refer to, as an example, the report from the task force, which was very business-oriented. I think even a church is a business; a school is a

business. Services are provided [and] dollars are needed for the services. So I think there's a lot of application of my background to the conversation on education in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON asked what her view is on parent-led schools, particularly charter schools.

MS. HEARD responded that she thinks charter schools are an alternative to the traditional public education, which she would support. She said she thinks the charter school is a viable example of how parent involvement can be a positive influence on a child's education. She added that she believes that is possible through public schools as well. The school administrators, the teachers, the students, and the parents all need to be involved in a child's education. She said she supports the charter schools and the public schools, which are overseen by the district.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON stated that this spring a few [legislators] approached the state school board to be an alternative sponsor for charter schools. He said, apparently, the most successful charter school programs in the nation provide for an alternative sponsorship in addition to the local district. He asked Ms. Heard if she would be supportive of an alternative sponsoring group for charter schools in [Alaska].

MS. HEARD replied that she thinks her response to that would be very broad. She stated that there are many things that are done differently in the Lower 48 than here, and she thinks Alaskans hold themselves out to be different. She said she thinks [Alaska] has opportunities to learn from [the Lower 48] but that [Alaska] is also in a position, through the Department of Education and Early Development and the Alaska Legislature, to show some new things to those in the Lower 48. She added that while there may be an alternate sponsor, she is not well versed enough at this time to speak directly on who that sponsor might be.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON stated that yesterday in Children's Caucus there was a young woman who spoke from Kotlik who was visiting a school in Anchorage. She stated that she was stunned in class to see that the "city kids" talked and told jokes when the teacher was trying to teach. She said that was a marked contrast to home, where the kids paid attention to the teacher. He asked Ms. Heard if teachers ought to be able to use discipline and control their classes.

MS. HEARD responded that she is not sure the schools can fully hold students accountable, if there isn't some level of discipline available to the instructor.

Number 1080

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS stated that there seems to be a lot of interest in both the university and [kindergarten through 12th grade] in vocational education. He asked Ms. Heard if she has any thoughts in terms of vocational education, and what the board could do about it.

MS. HEARD answered that her only thought on that is:

Students need to be educated to a level that gives them choice. And that choice may move them to be immediately in the workforce, or it may move them to go to college, but either way they need a choice. If students are to have a chance, they have to have a choice. I liken this to going to a restaurant. If the menu only has hot dogs and hamburgers, a student will never ask for halibut because it is not available. ... The state board of education will be meeting in Seward in June, and I am looking forward to going to the Vocational Tech Center.

CHAIR BUNDE stated that as a businessperson Ms. Heard may have heard from her colleagues who are frustrated that the high school graduates are functionally illiterate, and not able to perform at a level to take entry-level jobs. He asked what her position is on the high school competency test, and if her view from the business world is one that seems to be shared by others.

MS. HEARD responded:

The business world has left me feeling that there are not enough qualified people to fill positions. That does not mean that they're not educated enough, but maybe not specifically for the responsibilities of the positions they are applying for. I think that we as a society have a responsibility to have children prepared upon exit of high school, to be gainfully employed, [and] to participate fully in society. ... I know through my reading that it was the business professions that came to the legislature to bring to

light that people were not coming out of schools with the education they need to take a job. But even with the exit exam, I think there is an onus on the employer to determine for [himself or herself] that the individual is qualified for the job they're applying for.

Number 1260

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, came forth and stated that she is an administrator for teacher certification, has taught in Alaska for over 20 years, and is a nationally board-certified teacher in early childhood. She said she feels that education is the most important thing that is going on in the world today.

CHAIR BUNDE asked if it is fair to say that the Professional Teaching Practices Commission is the appeals route for teachers who have been questioned on their practice.

MS. CURRAN answered yes, it is, but [the commission] also realizes that they need to be more proactive with the new teachers coming into the state, in letting them know what the code of ethics is. Therefore, [the commission] has begun some discussion on what can be done.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON asked how the commission is going to be more proactive.

MS. CURRAN responded that when the [commission members] meet with teachers, they can talk to them about what the code of ethics is. She stated that when teachers receive their certificates, they are given a pamphlet of what the code of ethics is; however, like so many things people get in the mail, it is put aside.

Number 1345

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON asked if there are new issues coming up that may need to be readdressed in terms of ethics.

MS. CURRAN answered that this will be her first term; therefore, she is not familiar with what has come before the Professional Teaching Practices Commission in the past.

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS asked what problems are being faced in finding good teachers in Alaska.

MS. CURRAN replied:

The entire United States is facing a teacher shortage. ... Teachers are looking for lots of different things: challenges, different experiences. I hesitate to bring up pay, but that is a factor; many teachers are looking elsewhere before they would come to Alaska. The spirit of adventure is what really brings people here. And having been here for so long, that's what keeps you here, ... being able to see the state and work with so many different kinds of people. A place where you feel valued as a professional is very important, where your opinion is taken into consideration, where you feel you can make a difference.

Number 1430

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA stated that one of the things that has been thought about a lot right now in the legislature is Alaska's extraordinarily high suicide rate, especially with young children and teenagers. She asked if morale really does seep on down through, and if Ms. Curran can think of other ways to make [Alaska's] schools a place that gives children hope for the future.

MS. CURRAN answered:

Being in buildings that aren't crumbling, that are cheerful places, [and] are safe places helps to make children feel that they are valued. Their parents come in; they see that they are valued. Involving whole communities in education - it can't just be done by the teachers or the principals. It takes a whole community to have a successful school. And when you involve everyone in the community ... there's more promise for the future. Things are never going to be perfect, wherever we are, but we can work hard to make it better. ... I think that's what we're trying to do in education.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE asked Ms. Curran, if the Professional Teaching Practices Commission had an opportunity to be

proactive, what she would see as important to be proactive about.

MS. CURRAN responded that teachers need to understand what the code of ethics is; what is acceptable and not acceptable; the ways to behave toward parents, students, other faculty, and the community as a whole; and what's important in education.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE remarked that the state faces a shortage in teachers. He asked Ms. Curran if she thinks it is the role of [the Professional Teaching Practices Commission] to begin looking at ways to fill that need, and what some of those ways would be.

MS. CURRAN replied that she believes the commission has the right to make suggestions to the Board of Education and Early Development. However, she said a lot of [the commission's] time is spent in dealing with violations.

Number 1620

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN made a motion to advance the nominations of Georgia Sue Cast, Patricia Truman, and Cynthia Curran to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission out of committee. There being no objection, the confirmations were advanced for all three appointees.

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN made a motion to advance the nomination of Diane Heard to the Board of Education & Early Development out of committee. There being no objection, the confirmation was advanced.

ADJOURNMENT

The joint meeting of the House Special Committee on Education and the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee was adjourned at 8:39 a.m. [The minutes for HB 239, HB 171, HB 218, and SB 86 are found in the 8:40 a.m. House Special Committee on Education minutes of the same date.]