

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 6, 2001

8:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative John Coghill, Chair
Representative Jeannette James
Representative Hugh Fate
Representative Gary Stevens
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Harry Crawford
Representative Joe Hayes

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 100

"An Act establishing the third Saturday of each June as Juneteenth Day."

- MOVED HB 100 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS ACTION

BILL: HB 100

SHORT TITLE:JUNETEENTH DAY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S)MCGUIRE

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page	Action	
01/31/01	0213	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/31/01	0213	(H)	STA
01/31/01	0213	(H)	REFERRED TO STATE AFFAIRS
02/06/01		(H)	STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 102

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE LESIL MCGUIRE

Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 418
Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as sponsor of HB 100.

JAMES N. "DINO" ALLEN
2125 Kimberly Lynn Circle
Anchorage, Alaska 99515

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 100.

Celeste Graham Hodge, President
Anchorage Branch, NAACP
P.O. Box 100405,
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified that Anchorage NAACP supports HB 100.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-10, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIRMAN JOHN COGHILL called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. He noted that all committee members were present.

HB 100-JUNETEENTH DAY

Number 0085

CHAIR COGHILL announced the committee would hear testimony on HOUSE BILL NO. 100, "An Act establishing the third Saturday of each June as Juneteenth Day."

Number 0116

REPRESENTATIVE LESIL MCGUIRE, Alaska State Legislature, testified as sponsor of HB 100. Representative McGuire introduced Juneteenth as "the oldest known celebration of the ending of slavery." Freedom actually came through the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, but slaves in Galveston, Texas, did not get word of it until June 19, 1865, she explained; adding, "Juneteenth gets its name from that date, June nineteenth."

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE noted that Juneteenth is a state holiday in Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, and Delaware, and has been celebrated in Anchorage for the past eight years. She said it is an unpaid holiday celebrated on the third Saturday of June. Congress passed a Republican-sponsored resolution in 1997 recognizing the holiday, she continued, but [then-President]

Clinton did not issue a proclamation to make it official. President Bush is expected to make recognition official this year, and has been asked to do so on June 19, she said. She asked all members to support HB 100.

Number 0298

JAMES N. "DINO" ALLEN, of Anchorage, testified by teleconference. He said he has been promoting the Juneteenth celebration in Anchorage for the past eight years; however, the celebration there has been going on for more than 20 years, sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and others. He said it is a great celebration in Anchorage and elsewhere. In Ontario, California, last year, there was a Juneteenth conference where the agenda "was just to get everybody to celebrate it in every state, regardless of a holiday," he said. "Now they want to take it to a different level and get it recognized ... as an official day of celebration, an official day to recognize freedom." Freedom is what America has been built on, he pointed out; but at the time of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, African-Americans' ancestors were not free. "We think that [in] recognizing [June 19] in 1865 when official freedom came about, we might be able to begin the healing of the country [which was once divided over slavery]," he concluded.

CHAIR COGHILL thanked Mr. Allen for his interest and for the work he has done on the organizational effort.

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE said she thinks it is "a great statement we are making as a state," joining a nationwide movement to bring this to the forefront, "to educate people about the end of slavery and the suffering that has been endured on the part of African-Americans in our country."

REPRESENTATIVE JAMES said this causes her to ponder where we are today in relation to 1865, and [about] the claims of racism in our country. She noted that in this country, we have, "more freedom than anyone does in any other country in the world" and that "everyone has the same opportunity and it's an individual endeavor for us to get there." She said she is proud that Alaska has such a "diverse potpourri of all different races and cultures," and thinks we should celebrate that all Alaskans are free and equal. She said she thinks HB 100 is a step in the right direction, pointing out that there is still some slavery today, that there are white slaves, and that slavery is a

"horrible thing" and is wrong, no matter who it is [that is enslaved].

CHAIR COGHILL added that what they are doing in Anchorage [on Juneteenth] is truly celebrating freedom. He noted that this is "one of the few places in the world where we can say we've overcome some of our bad things in our society, and as long as that's the emphasis of it [Juneteenth], I have no problem. If it becomes an issue that divides us rather than unifies us, then I think that it would be a step in the wrong direction, and that's something we need to continually guard against." But celebrating freedom is a wonderful thing, he said.

MR. ALLEN said he didn't know where any racial implications came from, and that was never the proponents' intention. "We're truly for freedom, and on the slavery issue, it has nothing to do with racism," he emphasized.

CHAIR COGHILL said he thinks what the committee is saying is that "we just need to guard against [racism] becoming the issue."

MR. ALLEN said he understood.

Number 0906

REPRESENTATIVE FATE expressed concern that June 19 is so close to July 4. He said he completely agrees with the concept of Juneteenth, but he said there seems to be some erosion of the meaning of July 4, and he wondered if the date could be backed up a week or something like that.

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE explained that June 19 comes from the official proclamation from Galveston, Texas, on that date, "so it is set in stone." She echoed what Mr. Allen had said about this being an opportunity for all races to come together to celebrate the end of "a really terrible time in our history." She said she thinks, "It's OK for us to look back as a nation and recognize where we have erred and where we have made mistakes, and celebrate the fact that we've moved beyond that." She said it wouldn't be any more appropriate to change the date of June 19 than it would be to change the date of July 4.

MR. ALLEN pointed out that the celebration is on the third Saturday, regardless of whether that actually falls on June 19.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON called the committee's attention to the "History of Juneteenth," included in their packets. "Once you read this, everything makes more sense," she said. She never heard of this when she lived in North Carolina, and that's a shame, she said, because she thinks there are a lot of places in our nation -- although we may not notice it so much here in Alaska -- but in other parts of the United States, "there are still feelings on both sides," she said. She said she thinks [the Juneteenth celebration] is wonderful and that "we need to join with them and help them celebrate."

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE emphasized that although the date was actually June 19, 1865, it is celebrated on the third Saturday in June. Part of that, she explained, is that it is an unpaid holiday, and Saturday is a day when most people are not working and have a chance to ... (indisc.-coughing).

Number 1160

CHAIR COGHILL observed that one of the reasons this bill moved so easily is that it is an unpaid holiday. He said he thinks there is a movement toward a national holiday, and that [HB 100] will probably reinforce that effort.

REPRESENTATIVE JAMES clarified that she had not intended to suggest, "that this was a racial issue at all." "It is in my heart, a celebration ... that we will not accept slavery in this nation," she avowed. Historically, slavery was an atrocious thing for African-Americans, but there still are people in bondage, "and if we can draw attention to the slavery issue, I think we make it a bigger issue than just the freedom of the African-Americans," she said. "Everyone, regardless of your color or your creed or whatever, every human is intended to have the same freedom as every other one, and there should be no slavery, no bondage at all in this nation."

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS agreed with Representative James that "we have a lot to be proud of in this country, where we are today, but we also have a lot to feel bad about,...[including] the treatment of Negro slaves as well as the treatment of Alaska Natives and other Native Americans." We have had a tradition of mistreatment of people because of their races," he said. In the short time he has been in Alaska, since 1970, he has seen mistreatment of Native people, and it wasn't that long ago that the Native people of Alaska received the right to vote, he recalled. "So it's not that far from where we are right now," he said. "I think all this says, really basically, is that we

need to be constantly vigilant and never allow this to happen again, and constantly work toward racial equality. This is very positive and very good, and I know we'll support it," he concluded.

Number 1340

CELESTE GRAHAM HODGE, President, Anchorage Branch, NAACP, testified by teleconference. She said HB 100 is definitely something that should be supported. Slavery and lynchings are not that far in the past, she said. But now, it is time to move in a positive direction, she stated, and celebrating Juneteenth is something that the NAACP definitely supports.

Number 1416

REPRESENTATIVE HAYES moved to report HB 100 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal note. There being no objection; House Bill 100 was reported out of the House State Affairs Standing Committee.

ADJOURNMENT

Number 1443

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:25 a.m.