

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 6, 2003

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator John Cowdery, Vice Chair
Senator Fred Dyson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gretchen Guess
Senator Lyman Hoffman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Confirmation Hearings:

State Commission on Human Rights - Grace Merkes, Lester
Lunceford, Robert B Sawyer, Jr;

Alaska Public Offices Commission - Larry D. Wood;

CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 4

Relating to Avalanche Awareness Month.

MOVED CSSCR 4 (STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 77

"An Act naming the William Ransom Wood Centennial Bridge in
Fairbanks."

MOVED SB 77 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS ACTION

Confirmations - No previous action to record.

SCR 4 - No previous action to record.

SB 77 - No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

Grace Merkes

State Commission on Human Rights nominee

No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding confirmation

Lester Lunceford

State Commission on Human Rights nominee
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding confirmation

Robert B. Sawyer, Jr.
State Commission on Human Rights nominee
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding confirmation

Larry D. Wood
Alaska Public Offices Commission nominee
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding confirmation

Senator Lyda Green
Alaska State Capitol, Room 516
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor SCR 4

Bill Glude
Southeast Alaska Avalanche Center
P.O. Box 20578
Juneau, AK 99802

POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SJR 4

Aedene Arthur
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SJR 4

Gary Wilken
Alaska State Capitol, Room 518
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor SB 77

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-6, SIDE A

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present were Senators Dyson, Cowdery and Chair Gary Stevens.

Confirmation hearings for the State Commission on Human Rights and the Alaska Public Offices Commission were the first order of business.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked Grace Merkes to give background information on herself.

GRACE MERKES, nominee to the State Commission on Human Rights, testified via teleconference and described herself as a 40 year Kenai Peninsula resident who has been a restaurant owner, real estate broker and an administrative assistant with the Division of Family and Youth Services. She advised she is a member of the Kenai Assembly and has a strong background in service organizations. She feels she is able to make good unbiased decisions.

SENATOR COWDERY asked her to evaluate the commission activities in the last ten years.

MRS. MERKES replied although she hadn't attended any meetings, her reading indicates the board works hard to resolve discrimination complaints. Educating individuals as to their rights is very important.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS noted she was very involved in the community.

There were no further questions of Mrs. Merkes. The Chair asked for a motion.

SENATOR COWDERY made a motion to forward Grace Merkes' name to the joint body for confirmation as a member of the State Commission on Human Rights.

There being no objection, it was so ordered.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked Larry Wood to give his testimony.

LARRY WOOD, nominee to the Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC), testified via teleconference. He was born in Alaska and has lived in Eagle River for the last 18 years. He advised members a copy of his resume was in the packets. He has practiced law for the last 28 years most recently as assistant general counsel to Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. Local interests include the Eagle River Chamber of Commerce, the local bar association and the church.

He said his interest in APOC stems from his appointment to fill a term for a commissioner who resigned. He's appreciative of his

legal background because the commission has a complicated regulatory job.

SENATOR COWDERY asked for the purpose of APOC.

MR. WOOD replied it has four important functions; campaign financing laws, lobbying registration, disclosure of income and interests by public officials and investigation and adjudication of complaints that are filed.

SENATOR COWDERY asked him to comment on the view that APOC might not always act in a non-partisan manner.

MR. WOOD replied the commission is composed of two Republican Party members, two Democratic Party members and a fifth member who is independent in an effort to address those concerns and the substance of the work he has seen has been impressive.

SENATOR COWDERY asked whether he favored full campaign finance reporting as well as on line reporting.

MR. WOOD replied he supported both.

SENATOR COWDERY asked what he thought about the Attorney General's Office handling complaints.

MR. WOOD replied, as a former attorney for the State of Alaska, he wondered what resources the Department of Law has that could take over the work that is being done by APOC.

SENATOR COWDERY admitted he didn't know what the budget was for APOC but he did know there was talk of its elimination with the duties spread between the Division of Elections and the Department of Law.

MR. WOOD advised the budget is about \$800,000 and he appreciates the process of reevaluating state spending.

SENATOR COWDERY thought hiring temporary help might be a solution.

MR. WOOD said commission members would meet telephonically to examine what information they could provide to the Legislature to help with the considerations.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked Senator Dyson whether he had questions for a fellow Eagle River resident.

SENATOR DYSON described Mr. Wood as an exceptional candidate with exceptional experience.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS commented his resume was impressive. He asked for a motion.

SENATOR DYSON made a motion to forward Larry Wood's name to the joint body for confirmation as a member of the Alaska Public Offices Commission.

There being no objection, it was so ordered.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS announced they would hear from Lester Lunceford.

LESTER LUNCEFORD, nominee to the State Commission on Human Rights, testified via teleconference. He is currently the Mayor of Whittier and prior to that he was the Whittier Chief of Police. He has lived in Alaska for 20 years and has an extensive background in investigation and law enforcement. He was pleased to have been nominated.

SENATOR COWDERY advised he has found Mr. Lunceford to be most professional and he would do a good job.

SENATOR DYSON thanked Mr. Lunceford for being willing to serve.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked for a motion.

SENATOR COWDERY made a motion to forward Mr. Lunceford's name to the joint body for confirmation as a member of the Alaska Commission on Human Rights.

There being no objection, it was so ordered.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS announced they would hear from Robert B. Sawyer, Jr.

ROBERT B. SAWYER, JR., nominee to the State Commission on Human Rights, testified via teleconference. He moved to Alaska in 1981 when he was in the Army and was the Command Sergeant Major at Fort Wainwright before he retired. His military experience gave him the opportunity to interact with people of all cultures. He has an impressive public service record and would like to serve on the commission to help enforce human rights laws.

SENATOR COWDERY asked what aspect of his experience best prepared him for this job.

MR. SAWYER, JR. thought his time in the service best prepared him to be a commission member.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked if he expected to complete a doctorate in 2004.

MR. SAWYER, JR. replied that is still one of his goals, but his volunteer work has delayed that pursuit.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked for a motion.

SENATOR COWDERY made a motion to forward the name, Robert B. Sawyer, Jr., to the joint body for confirmation as a member of the State Commission on Human Rights.

There being no objection, it was so ordered.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS announced the next order of business was SCR 4.

#SCR 4

SCR 4-AVALANCHE AWARENESS MONTH

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked for a motion to adopt the committee substitute (CS).

SENATOR JOHN COWDERY made a motion to adopt CSSCR 4, \D Kurtz 3/6/03 version.

There being no objection, it was so ordered.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked Senator Green to present the resolution.

SENATOR LYDA GREEN, resolution sponsor, explained on page 2, lines 17-18 the CS deletes reference to "Cleary Summit" and adds "Moose Mountain, Ski Land, Birch Hill."

This is the third time a concurrent resolution regarding avalanche awareness month has been introduced. "This proclamation would proclaim November 2003 as Avalanche Awareness Month. This proclamation would raise public awareness of the hazards associated with avalanches, and the opportunities to participate in avalanche safety training at the beginning of the

winter recreational season. It is hoped that public participation in avalanche safety programs will be increased and that this increased participation will result in saved lives during the winter."

BILL GLUDE, director and lead avalanche specialist for the Southeast Avalanche Center, testified the center is a non-profit educational corporation based in Juneau. The corporation lends strong endorsement to the resolution and does particular educational events in November for Avalanche Awareness Month. This year they presented an evening program and did radio and television advertisements. Alaska loses more people to avalanches than any other state. Currently it's mostly recreational users who are lost, but there are also a number of workers and urban residents that are exposed to avalanches.

He urged members to also support funding for avalanche education and forecasting programs. Senator Green has been most helpful regarding education funds, which have been put to good use.

SENATOR COWDERY noted Senator Green is a valuable ally due to her position on the Finance Committee.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called on Aedene Arthur.

AEDENE ARTHUR, a private citizen, testified via teleconference in support of the resolution. She spoke for the families and friends of the over 70 Alaskans that have died in avalanches since the mid 1980s. She and her husband lost their only son in the Turnagain Pass avalanche in March 1999. He was one of six who died in that avalanche. Three years ago she co-founded BART, a backcountry avalanche awareness group in her sons' memory. She urged members to pass the resolution.

4:05 pm

CHAIR GARY STEVENS extended his condolences for her loss.

He asked for a motion.

SENATOR DYSON made a motion to move CSSCR 4 (STA) \D version from committee with individual recommendations and zero fiscal note.

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#SB 77

SB 77-WILLIAM RANSOM WOOD CENTENNIAL BRIDGE

CHAIR GARY STEVENS asked Senator Wilken to introduce SB 77.

SENATOR GARY WILKEN, bill sponsor, showed members architectural renderings of the bridge crossing the Chena River in Fairbanks. Currently there is a 40 foot abutment projecting out over the river that will be finished during the 2003 building season.

He read the following sponsor statement into the record.

Senate Bill 77 names the Fairbanks Riverwalk Centennial Bridge in honor of a true visionary and leader for Alaska, Dr. William Ransom Wood.

Dr. Bill Wood arrived in Fairbanks, Alaska in 1960 with his wife Dorothy Jane, son Mark and daughter Karen, to serve as the fourth president of our University of Alaska. After thirteen years of leading the University and shaping it into a world-class institution, he retired from University service and, with his family, decided to remain in Fairbanks.

Though he retired, he never stopped serving his community. Dr. Wood was committed to making the place where he lived a better place than when he found it. He fulfilled that belief everyday of his 94 years. Even on his final days, he was offering words of wisdom and urging national, state, and local leaders to begin or to finish community projects.

Over the years, Dr. Wood was a leader to many; he was the Mayor of Fairbanks, Chair of Fairbanks Area Community Hospital Foundation, founder of Festival Fairbanks, founder of Fairbanks Industrial Development Corporation, and 1985 Alaskan of the Year. He was very active in Rotary International; serving as President, District 5010 Governor, and receiving Rotary's highest honor - the Service Above Self Award.

At the age of 94 years old, Dr. Wood, as executive director of Festival Fairbanks, desired to commemorate the centennial of Fairbanks with a pedestrian bridge over the Chena River to remember and respect the builders of the twentieth century. As Fairbanks celebrates its centennial this year, it is fitting

that this bridge be known statewide as the "William Ransom Wood Centennial Bridge" in honor of a truly remarkable leader.

Thank you for joining me in support of this legislation.

SENATOR WILKEN noted the letters of support include one from Senator Ted Stevens who was instrumental in securing funding for the bridge in 1999. The following hand written note was read into the record: "Bill Wood was probably THE builder of Fairbanks in this 20th century."

He advised the bridge costs \$3.1 million. It is funded with 900,000 federal dollars from Senator Stevens, \$2 million from federal highway funds and \$200,000 from the State of Alaska.

He encouraged members to support the bill.

CHAIR GARY STEVENS described Dr. Wood as a great man and leader.

There were no questions and no public comment.

He asked for a motion to move SB 77.

SENATOR COWDERY made a motion to move SB 77 from committee with individual recommendations and zero fiscal note.

There being no objection, it was so ordered.

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CHAIR GARY STEVENS adjourned the meeting at 4:15 pm.