

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 28, 2005

8:08 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Kurt Olson, Co-Chair  
Representative Bill Thomas, Co-Chair  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux  
Representative Mark Neuman  
Representative Woodie Salmon

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Pete Kott  
Representative Sharon Cissna

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 142(L&C)

"An Act relating to ownership of land by regional school boards; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 189

"An Act relating to an extension for review and approval of revisions to the Alaska coastal management program; providing for an effective date by amending the effective date of sec. 45, ch. 24, SLA 2003; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 189(CAR) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 12

Relating to the Joint Rural Assessment Task Force.

- MOVED CSHCR 12(CRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 142

SHORT TITLE: REGIONAL SCHOOL BD LAND OWNERSHIP

SPONSOR(S): LABOR & COMMERCE

03/16/05	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/16/05	(S)	L&C, FIN

03/31/05 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 211  
 03/31/05 (S) Heard & Held  
 03/31/05 (S) MINUTE(L&C)  
 04/05/05 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 211  
 04/05/05 (S) Moved CSSB 142(L&C) Out of Committee  
 04/05/05 (S) MINUTE(L&C)  
 04/06/05 (S) L&C RPT CS 4DP 1NR  
 NEW TITLE  
 04/06/05 (S) DP: BUNDE, DAVIS, SEEKINS, STEVENS B  
 04/06/05 (S) NR: ELLIS  
 04/19/05 (S) FIN RPT CS(L&C) 3DP 3NR  
 NEW TITLE  
 04/19/05 (S) DP: WILKEN, GREEN, BUNDE  
 04/19/05 (S) NR: HOFFMAN, OLSON, DYSON  
 04/19/05 (S) FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532  
 04/19/05 (S) Moved CSSB 142(L&C) Out of Committee  
 04/19/05 (S) MINUTE(FIN)  
 04/21/05 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
 04/21/05 (S) VERSION: CSSB 142(L&C)  
 04/22/05 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 04/22/05 (H) CRA, FIN  
 04/28/05 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 124

BILL: HB 189

SHORT TITLE: COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS  
 SPONSOR(S): STATE AFFAIRS

03/01/05 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 03/01/05 (H) CRA, STA, RES  
 04/28/05 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 124

BILL: HCR 12

SHORT TITLE: LEG TASK FORCE ON RURAL SUSTAINABILITY  
 SPONSOR(S): COMMUNITY & REGIONAL AFFAIRS

04/26/05 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 04/26/05 (H) CRA  
 04/28/05 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JANE ALBERTS, Staff  
 to Senator Con Bunde  
 Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee  
 Alaska State Legislature  
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 142 on behalf of the sponsor, Senator Bunde.

KIP KNUDSON, Deputy Commissioner of Aviation  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion of SB 142, answered questions.

PAM LEWIS  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
(No address provided)

POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion of SB 142, answered questions.

LOUIE FLORA, Staff  
to Representative Paul Seaton  
House State Affairs Standing Committee  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 189 on behalf of the sponsor, the House State Affairs Standing Committee of which Representative Seaton is the chair.

BILL JEFFRESS, Director  
Office of Project Management & Permitting  
Department of Natural Resources  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion on HB 189, related that the administration supports a six-month extension of the submittal date for the districts.

TOM LOHMAN, Attorney at Law  
Environmental Resource Specialist  
North Slope Borough  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion on HB 189, related that the North Slope Borough strongly supports the extension.

JOHN OSCAR, Program Director  
Cenaliulriit Lake Coastal Resource Service Area District  
Cenaliulriit, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion of HB 189, testified in support of a one-year extension rather than a six-month extension.

ANDREW DEVALPINE, Director  
Bristol Bay Coastal Resource Service Area  
Dillingham, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion of HB 189, testified in support of a six-month extension.

NOEL WOODS, Matanuska Valley Sportsman  
Palmer, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion of HB 189, indicated his support of an extension.

EDDY JEANS, Director  
School Finance  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions that arose during discussion of SB 142.

KACI SCHROEDER, Staff  
to Representative Bill Thomas  
House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HCR 12.

KATHIE WASSERMAN  
Alaska Municipal League  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion of HCR 12, related the need to look at the big picture with regard to problems in rural Alaska.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CO-CHAIR KURT OLSON** called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at [8:08:36 AM](#). Representatives Olson, Thomas, LeDoux, Neuman, and Salmon were present at the call to order.

#### SB 142-REGIONAL SCHOOL BD LAND OWNERSHIP

[8:08:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON announced that the first order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 142(L&C), "An Act relating to

ownership of land by regional school boards; and providing for an effective date."

[8:09:13 AM](#)

JANE ALBERTS, Staff to Senator Con Bunde, Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee, Alaska State Legislature, informed the committee that currently two statutes for state ownership of airports are in conflict. She specified that [AS 02.15.020] requires that Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) to conform with federal requirements so that the state can receive funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The other statute [AS 14.08.151(b)] provides regional school boards the opportunity to receive title to land used in relation to Rural Education Attendance Area (REAAs). Therefore, this legislation addresses the aforementioned statutory conflict. Ms. Alberts said that although the Alaska State Legislature clearly intended to allow REAAs greater control of their facilities through acquisition of title, there is no record that the legislature attempted to do so at the cost of federal liability, significant loss of federal funds, and a degraded state airport system. She informed the committee that several regional schools are located on airport property and some are even close to active runways and airport infrastructure. At various times, these regional school boards have requested that DOT&PF convey full title to airport lands. The aforementioned has caused confusion in the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) and DOT&PF, and therefore has cost staff time and attorney costs to defend DOT&PF's title to its airport property. Ms. Alberts stated that this legislation will clarify the intent of the conveyance language to exclude airport properties from that statute [AS 14.08.151(b)]. Under SB 142, no schools will be required to move off airport lands, rather it will merely [prohibit] schools from gaining title to the airport lands in the future.

[8:11:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX inquired as to why a school would want to own an airport.

MS. ALBERTS clarified that schools don't want to own an airport, but rather want to use some of the property belonging to the airport. Some of the smaller communities are limited in regard to where they can build or have school facilities. Therefore, the conflict is in regard to gaining title to land. If an airport needs extra land from the areas in conflict, this

legislation will provide DOT&PF with the ability to say it can't let the school have title to the land because it's necessary for FAA purposes.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the airport could lease property to schools until the land is actually needed by the airport.

MS. ALBERTS answered that she didn't believe so, but deferred to DOT&PF representatives.

[8:13:38 AM](#)

KIP KNUDSON, Deputy Commissioner of Aviation, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), informed the committee that currently approximately 10 schools are leasing land on airport property from DOT&PF. Under state statute, the schools have the right to seek the title of the land. However, that would jeopardize the assurances made to the FAA that the state would retain its title. He noted that several schools are currently leasing land from DOT&PF.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether those school districts could continue to lease the land from DOT&PF.

MR. KNUDSON replied yes.

[8:14:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN asked if there are expansion plans for the airports that would cause the schools, at the time of expansion, to lose the ability to lease those lands.

MR. KNUDSON said that if a school district is going to expand or build a new school, DOT&PF would work with EED and the school district to help them find land elsewhere. Usually when an expansion occurs, so long as it is moving away from the runway, DOT&PF continues to lease land to the school. However, DOT&PF generally tries to help the school find land off the airport site when there is a complete rebuild.

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN pointed out that a [March 24, 2005] letter from Commissioner Mike Barton, DOT&PF, states that some school districts have problems with this legislation. He inquired as to the problems that are leading to this legislation.

MR. KNUDSON said he would characterize it as a bureaucratic problem for DOT&PF due to the conflict in statute. He informed the committee that there have been three to four instances that have resulted in using a couple years of staff time to determine a reasonable conclusion.

[8:17:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN inquired as to why these schools were built on airport land. He also inquired as to whether the state or the federal government owns the land. Representative Neuman pointed out that CSSB 142(L&C) only includes the land, not the buildings and structures; he inquired as to how that works.

MR. KNUDSON explained that SB 142 included language in which DOT&PF wasn't interested. The current legislation only speaks to land title. He specified that DOT&PF doesn't want any buildings or anything else, the department merely needs to retain title to the land. With regard to why schools are located on airports, in many cases it's due to history and the increased FAA requirements for safety margins. In some areas, airport land is some of the only good land in the area.

[8:18:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX related her understanding that this legislation applies to REAAs as well as regular school districts.

MR. KNUDSON agreed.

[8:19:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON, upon determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[8:20:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN asked whether this could impact the ability of schools to continue the way they currently operate.

MR. KNUDSON answered that he didn't anticipate any problems with future plans for schools because it involves two state agencies working to achieve two fairly high goals. He mentioned that currently there are no conflicts.

[8:21:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SALMON highlighted that many small villages, such as Beaver, don't have access to public lands. He asked if [those present] have any solutions for the future.

MR. KNUDSON informed the committee that large portions of the community of Beaver are on airport lands, but it's land that isn't required for future airport needs. In this case, DOT&PF has requested removal of the federal reverter clause in order to return the land to the community. Where the aforementioned is possible, DOT&PF is willing to do so. Mr. Knudson surmised that schools will be located on airport land when that's the only land available.

[8:22:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX inquired as to how this legislation impacts schools that aren't within REAAs because AS 14.08.151, which is being amended by this legislation, speaks to REAAs. However, the earlier mentioned memorandum from Commissioner Barton specifies an area, Iliamna, which is not an REAA but has been involved in the conflict this legislation attempts to address.

MR. KNUDSON related his understanding that the statute addresses REAAs.

[8:23:51 AM](#)

PAM LEWIS, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), confirmed that this legislation addresses only REAAs, not organized school districts.

MR. KNUDSON informed the committee that in statute organized school districts don't have the ability to request title from state agencies.

MS. LEWIS agreed, noting that was her understanding as well.

[8:24:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SALMON recalled that several years ago there was a lagoon problem in Chalkyitsik, where the school was built on the hill next to the airport. However, later an airport expansion down the middle of the school district resulted in the lagoon being left on DOT&PF property. The lagoon was leaky and ran down the airport, which the community viewed as a safety

hazard. No one, the school district or DOT&PF, would take care of the problem. He asked if this legislation would address who is responsible for facilities located on airport, DOT&PF, property.

MR. KNUDSON replied no, but he offered to research the aforementioned situation and speak with Representative Salmon about his findings.

[8:26:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN requested that the committee take a closer look at how [this legislation] will impact the ability of schools to operate in the future. He expressed the need to talk with some of the school boards of the schools directly impacted by this.

[8:27:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON announced that SB 142 would be held over.

MS. ALBERTS related that Eddy Jeans, EED, has contacted all the impacted school districts and has received no negative comments.

[The committee returned to SB 142 later in the meeting.]

HB 189-COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

[8:27:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 189, "An Act relating to an extension for review and approval of revisions to the Alaska coastal management program; providing for an effective date by amending the effective date of sec. 45, ch. 24, SLA 2003; and providing for an effective date."

[8:28:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS moved to adopt CSHB 189, Version 24-LS0703\G, Bullock, 4/27/05, as the working document. There being no objection, Version G was before the committee.

[8:28:19 AM](#)

LOUIE FLORA, Staff to Representative Paul Seaton, House State Affairs Standing Committee (HSTA), Alaska State Legislature,

began by noting that the House State Affairs Standing Committee [members] just received Version G and although the committee does have concerns, it can live with it. Mr. Flora paraphrased from the following written sponsor statement:

The Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP) is a partnership between federal, state, and local governments providing state and local governments a voice in federal decision making. Alaska is one of 34 coastal and Great Lakes states and territories that utilize this program, a program that annually channels millions of dollars in federal grant money to the states. The ACMP has helped guide coastal development in the state since it was enacted in 1977.

Without the program the state and local governments lose their ability to control development on federal land and the Outer Continental Shelf. In addition the state will lose millions in federal coastal management planning money.

In 2003, [House Bill] 191 substantially revised the state coastal program. The federal Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) must approve the revised program. OCRM has determined that additional revisions are necessary before they can grant approval.

The 2003 legislation included state-imposed deadlines for revisions to local coastal programs. Coastal Districts are attempting to follow the statutory directive to revise their programs to meet the new requirements. However, OCRM has identified problems with the state's guidance to local districts regarding the scope and content of their program. The state will have to revise regulatory guidelines for the local districts before the new program can be approved by OCRM. In turn, the local districts will have to revise their programs to meet the new guidelines. It is a waste of time, money and effort for districts to revise their plans before the state's program is federally approved and any necessary changes have been made.

MR. FLORA related his understanding that Version G extends the program termination date specified in House Bill 191 from 2003.

8:31:15 AM

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN inquired as to the problems the House State Affairs Standing Committee has with Version G.

MR. FLORA explained that HSTA wanted districts to have enough time to compose their plans. Due to the negotiations between the state and the federal government regarding the ACMP there was a shifting target throughout the winter. Although there was a plan revision mandated in 2003 by House Bill 191, the guidelines kept changing. The HSTA committee wanted to be sure that the districts would have a solid agreement from which to work, but Version G doesn't specifically stipulate that the federal government approves the state program.

8:32:57 AM

CO-CHAIR OLSON pointed out that there are three more committees of referral for HB 189. He noted his intent to forward the legislation from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee. He related his belief that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Department of Administration will have an opportunity to provide more input.

8:33:32 AM

CO-CHAIR THOMAS related his understanding that the state and federal governments came to an agreement and [the legislation was changed to allow communities] six months. He related his further understanding that the six-month [extension] was the desire of the communities.

MR. FLORA agreed, and then suggested that perhaps a DNR representative could inform the committee of the status of the negotiations. He said he wasn't clear that an agreement had been reached.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS relayed that "we" were briefed by the administration that there was an agreement.

8:34:25 AM

BILL JEFFRESS, Director, Office of Project Management & Permitting, Department of Natural Resources, said that the briefing from the Governor's Office was accurate. The department has been in negotiations with OCRM since September, specifically with regard to the amendments to the coastal

program. An agreement with the federal government regarding how to obtain preliminary approval of the amendment has been reached. The aforementioned will trigger a National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) analysis of the changes. Mr. Jeffress specified that the governor offered and DNR is working toward extending the submittal date for the coastal districts since there are many specific issues that need to be communicated to the districts. The administration supports a six-month extension of the submittal date for the districts. Furthermore, it's critical to extend the state standards for another six months. Without such an extension, the ability to continue doing federal consistency is lost. Furthermore, without these standards there is a chance that [ACMP] would lose its staff and thus even if the program is approved by the end of this year there would be no staff to implement it. Mr. Jeffress highlighted that the governor and the department have committed to the sunset date of existing coastal plans, which would be 18 months from the enactment of the revised regulations that was July 1, 2004. Therefore, this legislation would extend the sunset date for the existing district plans and extend the period during which the coastal districts can submit revised plans to come into compliance with House Bill 191.

[8:37:31 AM](#)

TOM LOHMAN, Attorney at Law, Environmental Resource Specialist, North Slope Borough, related that the borough strongly supports the extension. The extension is necessary for all the districts to properly address the need to substantially revise the district plan. He informed the committee that most of the plans initially took three to four years to develop. The current requirement is for a complete overhaul of the local plan. Although there has been some contention that districts have not been working diligently to revise the plan since the passage of House Bill 191 in May 2003, he opined that's not true. He reminded the committee that all legislators should've received a letter from the Alaska Coastal District Association explaining why the 27 active coastal districts could not confidently move forward with a revision until earlier this year. There is still great uncertainty among the districts in what they can address in passing local policies under a revised plan, he opined. Some of these questions are significant. For instance, the North Slope Borough has questions regarding policies on subsistence and activities on federal land and the OCS federal waters off the North Slope. At the end of the plan revision, the districts will have less control and authority over local development than under the existing plan. Therefore, time to work with the more

than 200 coastal communities represented by the 27 coastal districts is necessary. He predicted that people will be greatly upset that the plans are being gutted. Local communities want and need development, but they want it to occur on their own terms. Furthermore, three of the DNR staff who perform plan reviews and work with the districts are leaving the agency; two of which are leaving in May and the other at the end of the summer. Mr. Lohman said that he didn't see how DNR could effectively review 27 coastal district plans if required to be submitted by July 1, 2005, and work on continuing to revise and modify these plans after submittal without an extension.

MR. LOHMAN related that none of the districts like where the administration has taken the program, which is so valued in so many communities. He characterized where the administration is taking the program as bad public policy. He relayed to the committee that there is a rumor that in a later committee there will be an attempt to place a sunset date in HB 189. However, it's entirely unnecessary, he opined, because local residents are the best controllers of development in their communities and have been doing a good job with that. He characterized the 2003 legislation as a solution in search of a problem. Mr. Lohman concluded by opining that the program is valuable and that anything that can be done to return meaningful local control to some extent would be appreciated. Furthermore, he expressed the need to have more time to explain the new program to the locals and attempt to make the best programs possible, which simply can't be accomplished under the current deadlines.

[8:42:34 AM](#)

JOHN OSCAR, Program Director, Cenaliulriit Lake Coastal Resource Service Area District, informed the committee that the aforementioned district serves 38 villages, which is the largest number of remote communities in the state. This program is important to the remote communities in the state in order to provide an avenue for participation in the decision-making process and addressing local concerns. One of the important local concerns is subsistence and enforceable policies. For example, in Tuluksak there is an application for mining in the headwaters, which was of great concern for the residents. The district was successful in bringing stakeholders together to discuss the matter. He noted that the district is in the process of working with other communities to address the Kuskokwim drainage issue. Mr. Oscar refuted the allegation that these programs have been dragging their feet, and turned attention to an April letter in which the Alaska Coastal

District Association identified solid reasons as to why the districts didn't receive solid guidance. The districts only received a draft of the proposed regulations back in February. Mr. Oscar stressed the need for an extension, specifically a one-year extension rather than a six-month extension because the Cenaliulriit district would need more time than others.

[8:47:08 AM](#)

ANDREW DEVALPINE, Director, Bristol Bay Coastal Resource Service Area, testified in support of the six-month extension in order to elicit more participation in the region. Obtaining meaningful participation before the current deadline is virtually out of the question.

[8:48:43 AM](#)

NOEL WOODS, Matanuska Valley Sportsman, related that the local administration is claiming that the existing coastal management plan allows them to regulate the waters reserved for public use within the state, such that these areas are closed to various activities and at certain times. However, there has been no definitive explanation for the aforementioned. He related his assumption that this will take some time to resolve, and therefore he said he would appreciate an extension.

[8:50:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN commented that he trusts Mr. Woods' judgment on this matter.

[8:50:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON, upon determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[8:50:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX moved to report CSHB 189, Version 24-LS0703\G, Bullock, 4/27/05, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 189(CRA) was reported from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

SB 142-REGIONAL SCHOOL BD LAND OWNERSHIP

[8:51:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON returned the committee's attention to SB 142.

[8:51:38 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), responded to earlier questions by offering the following information. This legislation, SB 142, only applies to Rural Education Attendance Areas (REAs) school districts. He informed the committee that currently there are about seven schools that have been built on airport land. He related his understanding that this legislation wouldn't kick those schools off that land. When a new school is built in a community, typically the district requests that the old school be transferred to the community for the community's use. However, that wouldn't be allowed under this legislation. Mr. Jeans clarified that the [department] could continue to transfer the building, but the lands on which the building sits couldn't be transferred. Therefore, if the community wanted to use that building, it would have to move it off of the airport land.

[8:52:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON restated an earlier question regarding whether all of the 10 sites have been contacted.

MR. JEANS replied no.

[8:53:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN suggested that in the future perhaps there should be focus on regional learning centers. He reiterated his desire to talk with the school districts that would be impacted by this legislation.

[8:54:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SALMON asked if Chalkyitsik is included in the areas in which schools have been built on airport land.

MR. JEANS replied yes.

[8:54:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN said that his staff could prepare a report regarding the feeling of other districts.

[8:54:40 AM](#)

MR. JEANS related his experience that when dealing with construction of new schools, typically it isn't on airport land. The issue that will surface is in regard to the transfer of the surplus building to the community; some communities are adamant that they want those building for other community use. However, the buildings are on airport property and are no longer being used for school purposes. He specified that the aforementioned isn't impacting the educational program within those communities because that's addressed differently.

[8:55:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN highlighted the community of Galena as an example because the town wants to acquire and utilize some of the unutilized air force base buildings. Therefore, he questioned why such buildings would be torn down.

[8:56:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON announced that SB 142 would be held over.

HCR 12-LEG TASK FORCE ON RURAL SUSTAINABILITY

[8:56:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR OLSON announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 12, Relating to the Joint Rural Assessment Task Force.

[8:56:59 AM](#)

KACI SCHROEDER, Staff to Representative Bill Thomas, House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee, Alaska State Legislature, highlighted the state of the communities in Alaska. Communities throughout the state are becoming unable to provide services for residents or are shutting down completely. While revenue in these communities is declining, the cost of living is rising. Furthermore, many of these communities are unable to afford insurance, which automatically makes them ineligible for much state and federal funding. This resolution, HCR 12, provides that the Alaska State Legislature, the First Alaskans Institute, and the Alaska Municipal League will come together to form a task force, as specified in the resolution. This task force will work on and address issues rural communities are facing. First, there will be a community audit and needs

assessment. Several communities throughout the state will be strategically selected and studied in depth. These communities will be selected based on population, location, organization status, and whether they receive federal funds. The [community audit and needs assessment] will generate a report. The report, the Rural Energy Action Council's Finding and Action Recommendations, and the Denali Commission's Five-Year Strategic Plan will be used to develop legislative findings and draft legislation to be proposed in the next legislative session. Ms. Schroeder emphasized that HCR 12 isn't an attempt to side-step already-introduced legislation addressing problems in rural communities. Unfortunately, many of those don't address the entire picture, and therefore the desire is for the legislature to develop a working plan to solve as many of the problems in rural Alaska as possible.

[8:59:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS moved that the committee adopt CSHCR 12, Version 24-LS0964\F, Cook, 4/27/05, as the working document. There being no objection, Version F was before the committee.

[9:00:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said that he has four communities in his district that are suffering and almost defunct, which relates to his interest in moving this resolution along. Furthermore, he opined that it is this committee's job to go out and review the situation in these communities and come back with recommendations. He noted that the \$14,000 fiscal note will require a House Finance Committee referral.

[9:01:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN echoed Co-Chair Thomas' comments. He expressed the need to address the needs of the schools and determine how to make them better in rural areas. He informed the committee that 47.3 percent of Alaska Natives are graduating from high school, which needs to be improved. Representative Neuman announced his support for HCR 12, and related his willingness to testify in other committees to help move this resolution through the legislature.

[9:03:00 AM](#)

KATHIE WASSERMAN, Alaska Municipal League (AML), highlighted that "we" have all failed to look at the large picture. For

example, remodels of schools in some remote areas are funded, although no one takes into consideration that the community can't provide water or other necessities. Through discussions with those interested, the conclusion has been that there is the need to look at the large picture and the ability to do something, develop a plan, lays within the legislature.

[9:04:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX moved to report CSHCR 12, Version 24-LS0964\F, Cook, 4/27/05, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHCR 12(CRA) was reported from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:05 a.m.