

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

April 22, 2005

2:34 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Fred Dyson, Chair
Senator Gary Wilken, Vice Chair
Senator Kim Elton
Senator Donny Olson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyda Green

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS:

University of Alaska Board of Regents - Robert Martin

Board of Marital & Family Therapy - Kerry Rasmussen, Martha Swank

Board of Nursing - Terri Olson

The Professional Practices Commission - Karen Macklin

Board of Education and Early Childhood Development - Esther Cox, Shirley Holloway

Board of Psychologists and Psychological Associate Examiners - Destiny Sargent

Board of Dental Examiners - William Gerace

WITNESS REGISTER

KERRY RASSMUSSEN

Box 1122

Ward Cove, Alaska 99928

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

ESTHER COX

7705 Highlander Dr.

Anchorage, Alaska 99518

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

ROBERT MARTIN
9354 Rivercourt Way
Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

MARTHA SWANK
1727 West 5th
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

TERRI OLSON
4256 Birch Run Drive
Anchorage, AK 99507

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

KAREN MACKLIN
Sitka, Alaska 99835

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

SHIRLEY HOLLOWAY, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
801 West 10th Street, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

DESTINY SARGENT
Box 34881
Juneau, Alaska 99803

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

WILLIAM GERACE
1600 E Tudor Road.
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation candidate.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR FRED DYSON called the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [2:34:57 PM](#). Present were Senators Kim Elton, Donny Olson, Gary Wilken and Chair Fred Dyson.

CHAIR DYSON announced the confirmation hearings would be heard.

[2:38:02 PM](#)

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF MARITAL & FAMILY THERAPY

CHAIR DYSON asked MS. RASSMUSSEN the reason she desires to serve on the Board of Martial and Family Therapy.

KERRY RASSMUSSEN said she aspires to make changes such as requiring background checks for people in the field. She has lived in Ketchikan since 1967 and wants to help the community.

SENATOR OLSON said, "Looking at your resume, it seems that you have not had a lot of training in this field. How do you expect to add to your qualifications?"

MS. RASSMUSSEN responded she has been married for 37 years and believes that is a sufficient qualification.

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CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Cox the reason she wants to serve on the Board of Education and Early Development.

ESTHER COX replied she has served on the board for two years and this would be a reappointment.

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Cox the most important issue facing the education community.

MS. COX replied providing a quality education was the biggest challenge facing the community.

CHAIR DYSON asked her to give her opinion of groups trying to provide educational alternatives such as charter schools and distance education.

MS. COX responded she is fully in favor of providing educational alternatives to children so long as they are financially viable.

SENATOR WILKEN said he was disappointed in the Board for asking for funding for boarding schools without a long-term plan for management. He expressed hopes that the board would plan ahead in the future, especially with regards to boarding school policies. He asked Ms. Cox how she feels about the state's current funding of boarding schools.

MS. COX responded she is interested in the wellbeing of existing boarding schools such as Edgecumbe. She looks at the boarding schools from the perspective of academic performance, and teacher retention and from that perspective they are institutions that should be supported.

SENATOR WILKEN said there has been ongoing discussion about the possibility of the state providing cash incentives for improvements in academic performance on a school-by-school basis. He asked Ms. Cox what she felt about that possibility.

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MS. COX responded it is a concept that should be pursued.

SENATOR WILKEN said he would be willing to release the purse strings to help improve individual and school performance.

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CHAIR DYSON said he is disappointed in the net results of the regulations on distance schools and the present situation in which some parents buy materials that are academically acceptable. They are censored because they have religious content. He asked the witness what she felt about the regulations.

MS. COX responded she believes that parents should be allowed greater discretion in choosing their children's curriculum, but she is highly cognizant of how such allowances might affect funding for education.

CHAIR DYSON asked whether she felt that mathematicians like Pythagoras, who viewed the world as representing some kind of design, should be excluded from the curriculum.

MS. COX responded when the Office of the Attorney General says that something is unconstitutional she has a responsibility as a board member to accept its assertion as a truism.

CHAIR DYSON said:

That is absolutely inadequate and you should have the courage to stand up to the opinion of the Office of the Attorney General.

MS. COX said:

You seem to say that I should challenge the Attorney General and that is a very real possibility. I suppose that I would have to know a lot more than I now know in order to do that.

CHAIR DYSON said the opinion of the Attorney General is just an opinion and he encourages board members to question and perhaps act against that opinion.

SENATOR ELTON complemented the witness on her caution with respect to her consideration of funding for education.

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CONFIRMATION HEARING: UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA BOARD OF REGENTS

CHAIR DYSON asked Mr. Martin the reason he wants to serve on the Board of Regents for the University of Alaska.

ROBERT MARTIN responded as an alumnus of the University of Alaska (UA) system he has a vested interest in its wellbeing. He said that as he was growing up he looked up to family members who had graduated from college. Few native children have the opportunity to look to educated people as role models and he wanted to change that.

CHAIR DYSON applauded Mr. Martin's remarks.

SENATOR WILLKEN thanked the witness for his service.

SENATOR ELTON said he has known Mr. Martin for a long time and that the length and excellence of his service to the state is remarkable and highly commendable.

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CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Swank the reason she desires to serve on the Board of Marital and Family Therapy.

MARTHA SWANK responded she has been married for 47 years and has two children who are both married. Marriage and family have been a very important part of her life.

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Swank what she thought about combining two or three of the supervisory boards.

MS. SWANK responded she is in favor of combining some of the supervisory boards.

[3:04:28 PM](#)

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF NURSING

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Olson the reason she desires to serve on the Board of Nursing.

TERRI OLSON said as a registered nurse who is licensed by the Board of Nursing, she shares its mission of safety and excellence.

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Olson what she thinks about the state's decision to give nurses prescription authority.

MS. OLSON replied she thinks that it is wonderful, because it brings medical services into rural areas that would not otherwise have them.

SENATOR OLSON asked Ms. Olson why she included her Colorado license on her resume.

MS. OLSON responded that was her first license and she only maintains it on her resume for sentimental reasons.

CONFIRMATION HEARING: PROFESSIONAL TEACHING PRACTICES COMMISSION

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Macklin the reason she desires to serve on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

KAREN MACKLIN said her colleagues nominated her to the current position. It is important for a teacher to be on the commission and she feels particularly pleased to represent a rural prospective on it.

CHAIR DYSON said he feels the Sitka School District has an enlightened view of education and he applauds any part that Ms. Macklin has taken in the operation of the district.

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CHAIR DYSON asked whether the state has made any progress in the last few years in making life easier for special education teachers.

MS. MACKLIN replied due to the unfunded mandate of the No Child Left Behind Act and the high stakes exit exams, the schools have not been able to make significant progress in making things easier for special education teachers. Many of the new special education programs are difficult to implement since the school districts have difficulty providing time to train teachers for the programs.

[3:12:45 PM](#)

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Holloway the reason she desires to serve on the Board of Education and Early Child Development.

SHIRLEY HOLLOWAY said she wants to give something back.

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Holloway how she feels about the Board's funding of boarding schools and its prohibition of the state's reimbursement for religious correspondence programs.

MS. HOLLOWAY answered boarding schools should be carefully evaluated with regards to the relationship between funding and academic performance. The Board needs guidance from the Legislature in developing the state's boarding school policy. She supports performance incentives, but believes the Board should establish a growth model for all children, not just the children who meet the bar.

With respect to Chair Dyson's earlier question about religious correspondence programs, it seems that the chairman has information she has not seen. She was not aware of the audit or of the opinion that the Attorney General sent to the state board. She said correspondence is a wonderful concept and she thoroughly supports it.

[3:18:42 PM](#)

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINERS

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Sargent the reason she desires to serve on the Board of Psychologists and Psychological Associate Examiners.

DESTINY SARGENT said she wants to serve because she loves her job and wants to contribute at the board level.

CHAIR DYSON asked Ms. Sargent whether she senses problems within the field that need addressed.

MS. SARGENT said she does not know of any particular concern except that it is important to protect the integrity of the profession and the safety of its cliental.

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SENATOR ELTON said the witness is not only a professional who has provided services to people in desperate situations, but she is also an exceptionally kind person and he wholly supports her confirmation.

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF DENTAL EXAMINERS

CHAIR DYSON asked the Mr. Gerace the reason he desires to serve on the Board of Dental Examiners.

WILLIAM GERACE said he is very happy with his experience serving on the board. He has committed his adult life to excellence in dentistry and considers it his duty to look out for the dental health of the state.

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CHAIR DYSON said he has seen anecdotal evidence that an egregious number of children in Alaska are developing serious dental problems as a result of poor hygiene and diet.

MR. GERACE responded he would like to see more efforts directed to addressing the serious dental problems that exist in rural communities.

CHAIR DYSON thanked the candidates for answering the questions of the committee. There being no further business to come before the committee, he adjourned the meeting at [3:32:00 PM](#).