

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

March 25, 2008

2:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Bob Roses, Chair  
Representative Nancy Dahlstrom  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux  
Representative Jay Ramras  
Representative Scott Kawasaki

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Anna Fairclough  
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 383

"An Act establishing an exemption from the dentist licensing exam for certain persons."

- MOVED HB 383 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 18

Awarding the Alaska Decoration of Honor to certain members of the military.

- MOVED SCR 18 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 405

"An Act relating to forgiveness of a percentage of student loans for a member of the armed forces deployed since 2001."

- HEARD AND HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 383

SHORT TITLE: DENTIST LICENSE EXAM EXCEPTION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) COGHILL

|          |     |                                 |
|----------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 02/19/08 | (H) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 02/19/08 | (H) | MLV, L&C                        |
| 03/18/08 | (H) | MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124       |

03/18/08 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --  
03/25/08 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

BILL: SCR 18

SHORT TITLE: DECORATION OF HONOR  
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) WIELECHOWSKI

02/19/08 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/19/08 (S) HELD ON SECRETARY'S DESK  
02/20/08 (S) TAKEN UP  
02/21/08 (S) TAKEN UP  
02/21/08 (S) BEFORE THE SENATE ON FINAL PASSAGE  
02/21/08 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
02/21/08 (S) VERSION: SCR 18 AM  
02/29/08 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/29/08 (H) MLV  
03/25/08 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 405

SHORT TITLE: STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS FOR MILITARY  
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) CRAWFORD

02/19/08 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/19/08 (H) MLV, HES, FIN  
03/18/08 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124  
03/18/08 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --  
03/25/08 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

KAREN LIDSTER, Staff  
to Representative John Coghill  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HB 383 on behalf of  
Representative John Coghill, sponsor.

DAVE EICHLER, D.D.S.; President  
Alaska State Board of Dental Examiners  
North Pole, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Speaking as an individual, testified in  
support of HB 383.

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SCR 18, as the sponsor.

CHRIS BIRDSALL, Intern  
to Representative Harry Crawford  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HB 405 on behalf of Representative Harry Crawford, sponsor.

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director  
Postsecondary Education Commission  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 405.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CHAIR BOB ROSES** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at [2:30:07 PM](#). Representatives Ramras, Dahlstrom, LeDoux, and Roses were present at the call to order. Representative Kawasaki arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### HB 383-DENTIST LICENSE EXAM EXCEPTION

[2:30:35 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 383, "An Act establishing an exemption from the dentist licensing exam for certain persons."

[2:30:52 PM](#)

KAREN LIDSTER, Staff to Representative John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 383 on behalf of Representative John Coghill, sponsor. She informed the committee that the bill is a small change in existing statute in order to capture the talent and expertise of military dentists who serve in command positions. Ms. Lidster indicated that the bill has the support of the state Board of Dental Examiners, the Alaska Dental Society, and the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA). She explained that it is in the state's interest to allow the exchange of 20 hours of active clinical practice to be exchanged for military service in a full-time supervisory position.

[2:32:08 PM](#)

DAVE EICHLER, D.D.S.; President, Alaska State Board of Dental Examiners, informed the committee that he was testifying as an individual. He stated that he personally pursued this legislation to correct an oversight in statute. He gave an example of a highly qualified dentist, in a command position in the armed services, who did not qualify for licensure under the existing statute.

[2:33:56 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES closed public testimony.

[2:34:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM expressed her support for the bill.

[2:34:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAMRAS thanked Dr. Eichler for his testimony.

[2:35:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM moved to report HB 383, Version A, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 383 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

SCR 18-DECORATION OF HONOR

[2:35:29 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES announced that the next order of business would be SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 18, Awarding the Alaska Decoration of Honor to certain members of the military.

[2:35:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM stated that this is an issue on which many House members have been working for the past 18 months. The Alaska Decoration of Honor will be awarded to those who have given the ultimate sacrifice in defending our country. Representative Dahlstrom opined that this award is the least that Alaska can do to thank the veterans' families and she

expressed her interest in planning the first ceremony for the presentation of the coins and boxes.

[2:37:09 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES added that SCR 18 outlines the presentation and lists the recipients of an award that was established last year. He noted that the list of names is incomplete and recipients can be added as they become known.

[2:37:47 PM](#)

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, Alaska State Legislature, introduced SCR 18, as the sponsor. He stated that the resolution is a follow up to previously passed legislation, HB 244, and that the resolution lists the names of those who will receive the Alaska Decoration of Honor.

[2:38:47 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES closed public testimony.

[2:39:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM moved to report SCR 18, Version C.A, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, SCR 18 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

[2:39:31 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES expressed his belief that the committee members, and others, are very appreciative of this legislation.

[2:39:51 PM](#)

HB 405-STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS FOR MILITARY

[2:40:03 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 405, "An Act relating to forgiveness of a percentage of student loans for a member of the armed forces deployed since 2001."

[2:40:11 PM](#)

CHRIS BIRDSALL, Intern to Representative Harry Crawford, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 405 on behalf of Representative Crawford, sponsor. He stated that this bill will provide a 50 percent Alaska student loan forgiveness to residents who have served in the armed forces since 2001, and have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. This legislation is a way for the state to recognize the sacrifices made by veterans, and it will ease their re-entry into civilian life by reducing the financial burden of college.

[2:41:25 PM](#)

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director, Postsecondary Education Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), clarified that the bill provides for 50 percent forgiveness of any loan made by the Alaska Postsecondary Education Commission, including those administered by the commission for the state supplemental loan program and the federal family education loan program.

[2:42:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the state would be responsible for repayment of \$10,000 per loan to the federal loan program, on behalf of the servicemen.

[2:42:36 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS explained that the lender is the Alaska Student Loan Corporation, and the federal government simply guarantees repayment of the loan in the event of default.

[2:43:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAMRAS asked for the fiscal note attached to the bill. He then pointed out that there are armed service members who are unable to collect a permanent fund dividend (PFD) during their deployment and that the legislature has not taken the steps to resolve this situation. Representative Ramras expressed his hope that there will be testimony from the state and legal resources to address the question of resident status. He urged the committee to take into consideration the resistance, by standing committees and the legislature as a whole, to the establishment of resident status for deployed service members in order to qualify for the PFD. He noted his

personal support for the payment of PFDs to deployed service members.

[2:45:48 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS explained that the fiscal note was determined by identifying borrowers who had qualified for the 2007 PFD, and who had received a military deferment or forbearance on student loan payments. She clarified that the \$1.1 million cost is the immediate entitlement forgiveness, and future costs are indeterminate.

[2:46:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether there are any other areas of danger to which Alaska service members have been deployed.

[2:47:37 PM](#)

MR. BIRDSALL said that he did not know. He opined that the intent is to reward all of those who are serving in areas of danger.

[2:47:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX stated that, in the bill, loan forgiveness is limited to those who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

[2:48:23 PM](#)

MR. BIRDSALL acknowledged that the bill began with those who have served in Iraq; however, the sponsor does not oppose the expansion of the program to other troops.

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM stated her agreement with the intent of the bill. She supported the point made by Representative LeDoux to include others who are serving under dangerous conditions. She suggested changing the language in HB 405 to encompass all who are serving.

[2:50:27 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES noted the lack of sufficient time to consider this important issue. He indicated his intent to reschedule the bill, hear further testimony, and address the concerns of committee members.

[2:51:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAMRAS stated that he represents Ft. Wainwright, and that there is no greater source of pride. He pointed out that there are Alaska National Guard troops who are in no less danger. The complexity of the bill warrants further discussion, perhaps by Representative Kawasaki, who is a co-sponsor.

[2:52:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI agreed that there are questions about the bill. For example, how to determine whether a borrower is stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan, rather than on a brief assignment.

[2:53:45 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES encouraged the bill's sponsors to make improvements to be heard at later hearing.

[2:53:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAMRAS stressed that there are many more pieces to this legislation when the loss of life of other service members, such as the Coast Guard, is considered.

[2:54:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAHLSTROM encouraged the sponsor to add a policy for those who default in their student loans, previous to their application for forgiveness.

[2:55:40 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES explained that there could be a deliberate action to avoid payment prior to deployment.

[2:56:01 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS advised the committee that the period of time that an applicant could apply for forgiveness is not specified in the bill; in fact, there is no authorization for the Postsecondary Education Commission to write regulations and define the terms and conditions of the program.

[2:56:50 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES stated his support for further discussion by Ms. Barrans and the sponsor of HB 405.

[2:57:07 PM](#)

CHAIR ROSES announced that HB 405 would be held in committee with public testimony open.

[2:57:33 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 2:57 p.m.