

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

March 14, 2007

1:33 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Vice Chair
Senator John Cowdery
Senator Kim Elton
Senator Fred Dyson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 37

"An Act making an appropriation for a bioscience facility at the University of Alaska Fairbanks; and providing for an effective date."

MOVED SB 37 OUT OF COMMITTEE

Confirmation Hearings

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Eddy Jeans

Board of Education and Early Development

Pat Shier

Board of Dental Examiners

Newell Walther

Board of Nursing

Joanne Smith

Board of Dental Examiners

Arne Pihl

Board of Social Work Examiners

Paulette Scheurch

Board of Marital and Family Therapy

Larry Severson

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Jeffrey Hebard

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Michael Husa

Board of Pharmacy

Dirk White

State Medical Board

Jean Tsigonis
CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 37

SHORT TITLE: APPROP: BIOSCIENCE FACILITY UAF

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) WILKEN

01/16/07	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/5/07
01/16/07	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/07	(S)	HES, FIN
03/14/07	(S)	HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

Senator Gary Wilken
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 37

Mark Hamilton, President
University of Alaska
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 37

Buck Sharpton, Vice-chancellor of Research
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 37

Eddy Jeans, nominee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Pat Shier, nominee
Board of Education and Early Development
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Newell Walther, nominee
Board of Dental Examiners
Wasilla, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Joanne Smith, nominee

Board of Nursing
Wasilla, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Arne Pihl, nominee
Board of Dental Examiners
Ketchikan, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Paulette Scheurch, nominee
Board of Social Work Examiners
Anchorage, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Larry Severson, nominee
Board of Marital and Family Therapy
Anchorage, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Jeffrey Hebard, nominee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Fairbanks, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Michael Husa, nominee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Bethel, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Dirk White, nominee
Board of Pharmacy
Sitka, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Jean Tsigonis, nominee
State Medical Board
Fairbanks, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS called the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:33:43 PM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Elton, Dyson, Cowdery, Thomas, and Chair Davis.

SB 37-APPROP: BIOSCIENCE FACILITY UAF

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS announced SB 37 to be up for consideration.

SENATOR WILKEN, sponsor of SB 37, explained that the bill appropriates \$105 million from the general fund to the University of Alaska (UA) to design, construct, and equip a bioscience facility (BIOS) on the UA Fairbanks (UAF) campus. This is the only new construction project for the UA this year, and the 110,000 square foot building will house research laboratories, classroom, space, and teaching labs, consolidating current facilities. Each year the UA generates over \$130 million in outside funds to support research activities; construction of BIOS will provide much-needed space for research expansion.

[1:37:49 PM](#)

MARK HAMILTON, president of the UA system, said that it takes a long time to move a concept to reality, and the BIOS idea was first introduced in 2002 through a general order bond. The UA board of regents has termed BIOS the most important construction project currently underway.

[1:39:55 PM](#)

BUCK SHARPTON, Vice-chancellor of Research for the UAF, said that the building is so essential because research activities have grown by 75 percent since 2000; the UAF has an international reputation in certain fields built around research, and BIOS will allow the UA to consolidate its activities. He then listed services that the UA provides to Alaska, including an Alaska Native Health Center, and explained how the school's laboratories are currently out of date and must be modernized. The new building will also allow for expansion of engineering and agricultural programs.

[1:43:52 PM](#)

SENATOR THOMAS asked for clarification on the construction costs of the BIOS facility.

MR. HAMILTON said that there's a difference between construction and final costs.

MR. SHARPTON said that there are several components to the construction, including extensions and outfitting of the laboratories.

SENATOR COWDERY asked if the project can be bonded.

MR. SHARPTON said that it's possible, but it would mean continuing delays and resulting rises in construction costs. He commented that the construction of the gas pipeline will mean a limited future ability for building elsewhere in the state, and that using a bonding capacity in the years ahead could cause significant issues. At the very least, some phases should be done with non-bonded funding.

SENATOR COWDERY asked if design work has been done, and what the shelf life is for the plans.

MR. SHARPTON replied that some planning has been done, and should be usable for several years at least.

SENATOR COWDERY asked how much has been spent on BIOS to date.

MR. HAMILTON replied that the UA has spent \$22 million already on planning and preparation. The construction hasn't yet been funded.

MR. SHARPTON added that \$1 million in non-state funds has been put into planning.

SENATOR ELTON asked why the facility would be located in Fairbanks and not Anchorage, where many applicable programs are based.

MR. HAMILTON replied that equal excellence is needed in supporting sciences as well as in major fields, so that even programs very involved in medicine can't necessarily support a research facility.

MR. SHARPTON said that health services are based heavily on research, and that Anchorage and Juneau campuses are more attuned to application rather than research, like in Fairbanks.

[1:53:26 PM](#)

SENATOR THOMAS asked which building will be replaced by BIOS.

MR. SHARPTON replied that the Arctic Health building will be replaced.

[1:54:49 PM](#)

SENATOR THOMAS made a motion to move SB 37 from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s). There being no objection, the motion carried.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

CHAIR DAVIS announced that the committee would be considering the nominations of members to various state boards. She asked Mr. Eddy Jeans to comment on his nomination to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

[1:57:36 PM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director of School Finance for the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), said that the commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) requested his presence on the board. He said he has high ethics and will serve well on the board.

SENATOR COWDERY asked if Mr. Jeans' parents ever lived in Anchorage.

MR. JEANS replied that they did not.

[2:00:25 PM](#)

PAT SHIER, nominee to the Board of Education and Early Development, said that he is honored and humbled by the nomination and that the governor wants him to contribute his experience in vocational and alternative education models to the board's efforts.

CHAIR DAVIS asked for his occupation.

MR. SHIER said that he serves as Chief of Tax and Program Integrity at the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

SENATOR ELTON said that he appreciates Mr. Shier's focus on workforce development.

[2:02:25 PM](#)

NEWELL WALTHER, nominee to the Board of Dental Examiners, said that he's been practicing for the last 12 years in Alaska, including rural Alaska and Wasilla.

CHAIR DAVIS thanked him for his willingness to serve on the board.

SENATOR THOMAS asked why Mr. Walther moved away from Bethel.

MR. WALTHER said that his wife wanted an adventure in rural Alaska.

SENATOR ELTON welcomed the doctor to Juneau.

CHAIR DAVIS said that the committee would recommend his name for confirmation.

[2:05:35 PM](#)

JOANNE SMITH, nominee to the Board of Nursing, said that she's honored to be nominated, and related her work history in Alaska.

ARNE PIHL, nominee to the Board of Dental Examiners, said that he is a dentist in Ketchikan and that the nomination will be a reappointment for him.

SENATOR COWDERY asked how much time Mr. Pihl spends working for the board.

MR. PIHL replied that it depends in the situation, and that the board rotates its duties. He also serves as the state representative for the National Dental Examiners Group; generally work for the board involves about 12 days of travel per year.

SENATOR THOMAS asked if there are any particular issues that Mr. Pihl is concerned with.

MR. PIHL said that the main question at hand is the qualifications of the dental aides that Native communities are using; the board found them to be in violation of regulations but the attorney general disagreed. There are some frustrations with the hearing officers, but in general improvements are being made.

[2:10:58 PM](#)

PAULETTE SCHEURCH, nominee to the Board of Social Work Examiners, related her work history in Alaska, and said that she hopes to make a contribution to the board.

[2:12:43 PM](#)

LARRY SEVERSON, nominee to the Board of Marital and Family Therapy, said that he's honored to be nominated for the board, and he related his work history in Alaska. He added that he focuses on patient abuse issues.

[2:14:30 PM](#)

SENATOR DYSON commented that Dr. Severson has worked extensively with victims of child abuse in the state, and he has significant stature in the mental health community in the state.

[2:15:44 PM](#)

JEFFREY HEBARD, nominee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, related his work history in Alaska, and said that he would be honored to serve the state for a second term.

CHAIR DAVIS asked what he would like to see happen during his second term.

MR. HEBARD said that his initial term only lasted one year, but that he is impressed with the operation of the commission and is looking forward to working with them.

[2:18:16 PM](#)

MICHAEL HUSA, nominee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, said that he's honored to be recommended for the commission.

CHAIR DAVIS asked if this will be his first term.

MR. HUSA replied that it will be.

CHAIR DAVIS said that the committee would be forwarding his name for confirmation.

[2:19:25 PM](#)

DIRK WHITE, nominee to the Board of Pharmacy, said that he's honored to serve the state of Alaska and related his work history.

CHAIR DAVIS commented that Mr. White seems quite busy, and thanked him for his willingness to serve on the board.

[2:21:31 PM](#)

JEAN TSIGONIS, nominee to the State Medical Board, related her work history in Alaska and said that this would be her first term with the board.

SENATOR THOMAS asked if there are any issues Ms. Tsigonis plans to address before the board.

MS. TSIGONIS said that retaining the current physician workforce would be her main goal.

[2:23:44 PM](#)

SENATOR DYSON said that Dr. Jeffrey Gonnason, nominee to the Board of Examiners in Optometry and Senator Dyson's personal optometrist, is concerned about ethics within the profession and will be a great addition to the board.

SENATOR COWDERY said that Dr. Gonnason is his personal optometrist as well, and he's pleased to see his appointment.

CHAIR DAVIS commented that Dr. Gonnason lives in her district and will thus certainly be a good addition to the board. She related a personal story about how he has worked with her family.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Davis adjourned the meeting at [2:25:38 PM](#).