

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 26, 2009

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bob Herron, Co-Chair
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Co-Chair
Representative John Harris
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Charisse Millett
Representative Sharon Cissna
Representative Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 10

"An Act authorizing a borough to charge a city for costs of collecting certain taxes; relating to a mandatory exemption from municipal property taxes for residences of certain widows or widowers, and to optional exemptions from municipal property taxes for property of certain fraternal organizations, for certain college property, and for certain residential property; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 10(CRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 106

"An Act relating to village public safety officers and regional public safety officers."

- MOVED CSHB 106(CRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 15

Urging the United States Congress to change the name of Mount McKinley to Denali.

- MOVED CSHJR 15(CRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 10

SHORT TITLE: MUNICIPAL TAXES: COSTS/EXEMPTIONS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) GRUENBERG, CHENAULT, THOMAS, GARA,
HARRIS, KAWASAKI

01/20/09 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/09
01/20/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/09 (H) CRA, FIN
02/26/09 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 106

SHORT TITLE: VILLAGE & REGIONAL PUB.SAFETY OFFICERS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) JOULE

02/02/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/02/09 (H) CRA, STA
02/26/09 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HJR 15

SHORT TITLE: CHANGE NAME OF MT. MCKINLEY TO DENALI

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) KAWASAKI

02/09/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/09/09 (H) CRA, RES
02/26/09 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE MAX GRUENBERG

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as one of the joint prime sponsors of
HB 10.

VERNON MARSHALL, Lobbyist

Public Safety Employees Association (PSEA)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 10.

DOUGLAS NORTH, President

Alaska Pacific University

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained the need for Section 4 of HB 10.

STEVE VAN SANT, State Assessor

Division of Community & Regional Affairs

Department of Commerce, Community, & Economic Development
(DCCED)

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During hearing of HB 10, answered questions.

ELIZABETH HENSLEY, Intern
Representative Reggie Joule
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 106 on behalf of the sponsor, Representative Joule.

REPRESENTATIVE REGGIE JOULE
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as the sponsor of HB 106.

JOSEPH MASTERS, Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 106.

BOB SCHAEFFER, Public Services Director
Northwest Arctic Borough
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During hearing of HB 106, reviewed the history of the VPSO program.

SUE STANCLIFF, Special Assistant
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During hearing of HB 106, related the department's commitment to work with the sponsor.

SIKAURAQ MARTHA WHITING, Mayor
Northwest Arctic Borough
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 106.

REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT KAWASAKI
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as the sponsor of HJR 15.

DAVID MOORE, Member
Alaska Historical Commission
Office of History & Archaeology

Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation
Department of Natural Resources
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 15.

ROBERT CHARLIE, Executive Director
Cultural Heritage and Education Institute
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 15.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR CATHY ENGSTROM MUNOZ called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Munoz, Herron, Keller, and Cissna were present at the call to order. Representatives Harris, Millet, and Gardner arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 10-MUNICIPAL TAXES: COSTS/EXEMPTIONS

[8:03:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 10, "An Act authorizing a borough to charge a city for costs of collecting certain taxes; relating to a mandatory exemption from municipal property taxes for residences of certain widows or widowers, and to optional exemptions from municipal property taxes for property of certain fraternal organizations, for certain college property, and for certain residential property; and providing for an effective date."

[8:04:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MAX GRUENBERG, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as one of the joint prime sponsors of HB 10, began by informing the committee that HB 10 is similar to legislation that passed the House in the 25th Alaska State Legislature. This legislation has a variety of municipal tax exemptions. He reminded the committee that an amendment to Title 29 is required in order to allow a municipality to have a property tax. Section 1 is a new section, which was suggested by Representative Chenault at the request of the Kenai Peninsula Borough. Section 1 allows a borough that collects taxes on behalf of a municipality in the borough to charge the city a fee for the cost of collection.

Section 2 was added by Representative Harris to the legislation of the 25th Alaska State Legislature; it extends the real property municipal tax exemption for seniors, disabled veterans, and widows/widowers of a senior or disabled veteran. According to the state assessor, widows/widowers would cease to be eligible if they remarry. Section 3, which was added in the Senate during the 25th Alaska State Legislature, raises the optional municipal tax exemption for residential property from \$20,000 to \$40,000. Representative Gruenberg related his understanding that Section 3 will be removed. Section 4, which was added in the House Finance Committee during the 25th Alaska State Legislature, would allow property of a private nonprofit accredited college/university not subject to the mandatory tax exemption to receive a tax exemption. He related that Section 4 addresses a specific piece of property owned by the Alaska Pacific University, a medical building on the campus. Section 5, which was added by Representatives Olson and Stoltze during the last legislature, would provide a new optional tax exemption for an ordinance ratified by the voters that would exempt or partially exempt property of a fraternal organization used for a public purpose. He explained that the reasoning behind Section 5 was that in many communities such properties are used as the community meeting hall. Section 6, the original legislation, allows an exemption for the primary residence of police officers who move into an area designated as high crime. The exemption would be in the amount of up to \$150,000. Section 7 specifies an effective date of the beginning of the calendar year next year.

[8:10:52 AM](#)

VERNON MARSHALL, Lobbyist, Public Safety Employees Association (PSEA), related that the committee should have a statement from the PSEA in support of HB 10. Mr. Marshall opined that Section 6 of HB 10 is a means to attract officers to areas of high crime as it provides a sliding incentive in the form of tax relief. He characterized Section 10 as a tool that could be utilized at the local level.

[8:12:27 AM](#)

DOUGLAS NORTH, President, Alaska Pacific University (APU), pointed out that the committee packet should include two letters and one resolution all in favor of a tax exemption of this sort for the Alaska Pacific University (APU). When the Municipality of Anchorage Assembly passed its resolution, it took into consideration APU's 50 years of public service and economic

contributions to Alaska and Anchorage. Since 1995, APU has spent \$200 million locally; these funds are from personal contributors and tuition dollars. He emphasized that APU receives no funds from the State of Alaska or from any other institution on a regular basis. Furthermore, APU offers a large amount of public service in the form of a 175-acre park, a sports center, a ski training center, and other facilities. Most importantly, APU places \$1.2-\$1.5 million annually into scholarships for Alaska students. Dr. North highlighted that APU is the only remaining accredited private university/college in the state. The aforementioned is accomplished, he explained, because 60 percent of APU is funded from net tuition and the other 40 percent is from contributions and the foundation as well as the endowment lands. The endowment lands total currently about 25 acres, which are developed to produce income streams into the academic budget of the university itself, which accounts for about 12 percent of APU's income. Until three years ago, all the endowment lands and the developments on them were untaxed. In fact, APU hadn't been taxed since its origins in 1959. However, the Municipality of Anchorage did impose a tax on one APU building, which HB 10 would address. He related that APU was a land grant university and thus was encouraged to use its lands to support itself. Dr. North highlighted that the important part of the Municipality of Anchorage's resolution is that it encouraged the legislature to enact legislation that would level the playing field for APU such that it would fall under the same categories of tax exemption as the state's public university does.

[8:17:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA remarked that she is struck by the enormous amount of service APU does for the community in terms of the use of its lands as well as the artistic and intellectual contributions.

[8:18:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ inquired as to APU's tax liability for the past three years. She further inquired as to whether APU is in negotiations regarding this tax liability.

DR. NORTH confirmed that APU has challenged the taxation locally; however, it will take the legislature to achieve the goal. He explained that APU has escrowed the taxes in a separate account. The taxes on the building being taxed amount to about \$250,000, and the penalties are beginning to pile up as

well. This legislation is the best path to resolve the situation.

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ asked if HB 10 would provide retroactivity for the tax liability that has already accrued.

DR. NORTH responded that although that's not in current legislation, it would be preferable.

[8:20:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG, noting that he just became aware of the retroactivity issue, requested that the retroactivity issue be addressed in a future committee if the committee is prepared to forward HB 10.

DR. NORTH clarified that the only value in tax exemption would accrue to APU and its academic programs.

[8:22:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if the \$20,000 residential exemption in Section 3 is commonly used. He also inquired as to under what circumstances the residential exemption is used.

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ, speaking as a former finance chair for the City & Borough of Juneau, explained that the \$20,000 residential exemption is a tool that isn't used often. The exemption provides the municipality or the governing body to provide relief in certain special circumstances.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG related his understanding that the aforementioned exemption is used in Fairbanks.

[8:23:32 AM](#)

STEVE VAN SANT, State Assessor, Division of Community & Regional Affairs, Department of Commerce, Community, & Economic Development (DCCED), informed the committee that the residential exemption is used in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai, Valdez, Bristol Bay, and the North Slope Borough. All municipalities, save the Kenai Peninsula Borough, provide the residential exemption based on a percentage up to the \$20,000. The Kenai Peninsula Borough provides a flat \$20,000. In response to Co-Chair Munoz, Mr. Van Sant clarified that in the jurisdictions that utilize the residential exemption, all the residential property owner-occupied individuals receive the exemption.

[8:24:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA related her understanding that voter approval is required before the implementation of the exemption.

MR. VAN SANT confirmed that to be correct.

[8:25:17 AM](#)

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

[8:25:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved Amendment 1, as follows:

Page 2, lines 17-23;
Delete Section 3

There being no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[8:26:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved to report HB 10, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 10(CRA) was reported from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

HB 106-VILLAGE & REGIONAL PUB.SAFETY OFFICERS

[8:27:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 106, "An Act relating to village public safety officers and regional public safety officers."

[8:28:05 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved to adopt proposed CSHB 106, Version 26-LS0402\E, Luckhaupt, 2/25/09, as the working document. There being no objection, Version E was before the committee.

[8:28:49 AM](#)

ELIZABETH HENSLEY, Intern, Representative Reggie Joule, Alaska State Legislature, speaking on behalf of the sponsor, explained that HB 106 attempts to change the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program to enable municipalities to administer and receive grant funding for the VPSO program. The legislation seeks to ensure all villages in Alaska have a VPSO. She mentioned that this has been in the works for about five years. Ms. Hensley further explained that HB 106 will allow the Northwest Arctic Borough to take over the VPSO program, as the community desires.

[8:30:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REGGIE JOULE, Alaska State Legislature, related that [the proposal in HB 106] is a joint effort between Maniilaq Association and the Northwest Arctic Borough.

[8:31:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON pointed out that there has been a significant change in the focus of the legislation from boroughs to municipalities.

MS. HENSLEY explained that the change was recommended by the commissioner's office to make it possible for boroughs and other subdivisions of the state to administer the program. Therefore, legislation wouldn't be required for a community in which the Native corporation is unable to administer the program fully.

[8:32:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT inquired as to how the VPSO programs currently being performed by the Native corporation will be transferred to the municipalities.

MS. HENSLEY clarified that the VPSO program is working well in Southwest Alaska, and thus the intent is to let those continue. The intent [with HB 106] is to allow more flexibility so that another entity is allowed to run the VPSO program when a nonprofit corporation isn't able to do so.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT inquired as to who determines the program is or isn't working.

MS. HENSLEY explained that Maniilaq Association and the Northwest Arctic Borough have, along with the commissioner's office, discussed [the need for the program to be run by the

municipality]. She said that the aforementioned would be the model when a change is made. She noted that the commissioner's office does the contracting in conjunction with the Native corporation or the borough.

[8:35:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA opined that the VPSO presence is imperative in a community. She then inquired as to the different powers that communities assume, such as public health and police powers.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE pointed out that Representative Cissna had specified the level of powers that a borough may assume as a political subdivision. For example, as a home rule borough Barrow has assumed the power of health and public safety. However, that's not the case in the Northwest Arctic Borough. He noted that some incorporated municipalities have their own police departments. This legislation wouldn't impact the aforementioned. He reiterated that the Northwest Arctic Borough and Maniilaq Association have worked toward this end for a number of years and this legislation merely allows the borough to take over the agreement with the state; this legislation allows the commissioner the flexibility to allow such.

[8:37:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT inquired as to why municipalities and boroughs weren't included in the management of VPSOs initially.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE related his understanding that it was an effort to work with the outlying communities in the state and keep the program at the local level. Furthermore, at the time the VPSO program was established there weren't many boroughs.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT inquired as to how the Native nonprofits feel about HB 106.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE said that he hasn't heard from anyone because the intent is to provide flexibility with regard to who can provide the VPSO program. There is no intent to take the VPSO program away from the nonprofit associations.

[8:40:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT inquired as to whether there is preferential treatment with regard to what entity assumes the VPSO program.

MS. HENSLEY opined that the preference is in regard to what the community is asking for and what entities have the capacity and will to provide the VPSO program. At this time, the Northwest Arctic Borough feels it has the capacity to provide the VPSO program. Ms. Hensley said she didn't imagine there would be an automatic preference, nor is such reflected in HB 106.

[8:41:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to why HB 106 is necessary since an organized municipality surely has the ability to contract and receive funds to manage a VPSO program.

MS. HENSLEY explained that in order to participate in the VPSO program, this legislation must be passed. She then informed the committee that the VPSO program has many components, including a training component, a financial component, and a discussion component. The goal is to have a VPSO in every village possible, which HB 106 would help achieve faster. She related that in the Northwest Arctic Borough there is one VPSO and nine villages without VPSOs.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE explained that HB 106 is necessary because the borough doesn't have the financial wherewithal to assume the public safety powers it could as a borough. Therefore, HB 106 enables the state to contract with the borough to provide the service without the borough having to assume the broader powers.

[8:45:28 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON noted his support for HB 106. He then related his understanding that originally there were many tribal and village public safety officers and thus there was the desire to start the program within that framework. He said he supports HB 106 because there could be instances in which one wants to groom individuals within the community to be VPSOs, municipal officers, and ultimately state troopers. The program offers a good approach to building careers for young people in Alaska, he opined.

[8:47:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA, recalling her time on the [municipal level] public safety finance subcommittee, related her observation of the difficulty in increasing the number of VPSOs. She asked if [the VPSO program] is like an administrative partnership and the role of [the Department of Public Safety] is both financial and administrative.

[8:48:11 AM](#)

JOSEPH MASTERS, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, clarified that HB 106 isn't intended to change the VPSO program or how it interacts with the nonprofit corporations. He explained that the VPSO is a state program and not intended to provide officers to boroughs or municipalities, but rather is only intended to allow DPS to provide VPSO grants to villages through other entities [besides Native corporations] that can better administer the program. With regard to why boroughs and cities didn't initially participate in the VPSO program, Commissioner Masters related that the intent was to place safety officers in communities with a population of less than 1,000. This would be a cooperative relationship between the state, regional corporations, and the individual villages to have the most effective program. The VPSO wasn't intended to be a total state or government program without local input and collaboration.

[8:51:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON recalled a time when the attitude from the Alaska State Troopers was that VPSOs were unwanted, although he said he understood that's not the current attitude.

COMMISSIONER MASTERS opined that often the focus on law enforcement efforts and strategies is driven from the commissioner through to the deputy commissioners and down to those who actually administer the programs and initiatives. He said he wasn't comfortable characterizing the attitudes of previous commissioners or departmental leadership with regard to the VPSO program. However, he related that his rural law enforcement strategy is to increase the effectiveness of the troopers and the local level efforts, including the VPSO program. Commissioner Masters stated that the VPSO program is absolutely necessary in order to be effective in rural law enforcement.

[8:54:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS recalled the difficulty with drugs, alcohol, huffing, and etcetera in rural areas. Some of the remedy to the aforementioned issues has been more law enforcement in the area. However, it's difficult to place a trooper in every village. He asked if HB 106 helps to bring access to a VPSO in many of the smaller communities. He also asked if HB 106 helps with recruitment for the VPSO program from the local areas.

COMMISSIONER MASTERS specified that this legislation doesn't necessarily add VPSOs to communities that wouldn't already have been eligible to have VPSOs. The department continues to try to expand the capacity of the VPSO program. This legislation, he explained, allows those areas that can't effectively manage, recruit, and retain VPSOs to have another entity manage the program and fill the positions. In the case of the Northwest Arctic Borough, HB 106 would allow another entity, an entity that's better equipped to manage the program, to manage it. Therefore, this legislation does make [DPS] more effective in placing VPSOs in communities in those areas. Commissioner Masters then related his support for HB 106, although he mentioned some reservations with some of the language in the legislation. He noted that he has voiced those concerns with the sponsor and intends to work on those concerns between committees. In further response to Representative Harris, Commissioner Masters confirmed that his office works with the governor's office regarding all legislation on which he testifies. However, he said that he hasn't had a conversation with the governor on HB 106 specifically.

[8:59:47 AM](#)

BOB SCHAEFFER, Public Services Director, Northwest Arctic Borough, reviewed the history of the VPSO program. He recalled when the VPSO program was established in the 1970s, and related that it did work. At the time the Red Dog Mine wasn't in existence and the finances of the villages were minimal. However, once the Red Dog mine opened, the salaries in the area changed the income levels. The aforementioned resulted in the VPSO program becoming ineffective because no one could be paid enough to come to the villages and there were no benefits. Furthermore, there was no support and very little vacation time allowed. For the last five to six years it has been almost impossible to find folks to fill the VPSO positions simply because of the low salary. Furthermore, the infrastructure and buildings constructed in the 1970s have deteriorated. He then recalled that in 1986 the Northwest Arctic Borough established a

public safety commission to address the borough resident's concerns regarding public safety in general. Ultimately, the borough assembly requested that the borough administration find ways to address the lack of public safety. He noted that the Northwest Arctic Borough is a small borough that doesn't have the resources to take control of public safety. The public safety commission met multiple times and asked if the borough would like to take over public safety functions. In closing, Mr. Schaeffer specified that the Northwest Arctic Borough is looking for a mechanism to [provide public safety] and the belief is that the borough could put more resources in the program and likely become more successful in terms of recruitment.

[9:07:54 AM](#)

SUE STANCLIFF, Special Assistant, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, related that the department is committed to work with the sponsor regarding concerns the department has.

[9:08:42 AM](#)

SIIKAURAQ MARTHA WHITING, Mayor, Northwest Arctic Borough, related the Northwest Arctic Borough's support for HB 106. She further related that public service in law enforcement is a borough priority. Currently, the VPSO program is administered by the Maniilaq Association, a regional nonprofit that's doing all it can to provide [public safety] in the villages. There are many challenges, including finding local people who will pass the background check, low salaries, lack of housing, lack of jail facilities, long training periods outside the community, and lack of holding cells. There is also the challenge that people don't want to bust friends and family. The borough is up for those challenges, she opined. In 2006 the Northwest Arctic leadership team assigned the Northwest Arctic Borough to take the lead in public safety through the borough's public services department, although the borough doesn't have a mechanism to administer the VPSO program. On February 24th the Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly passed a resolution in support of HB 106 and recently hired a public safety manager to manage this program. Ms. Whiting emphasized that the smaller communities of the state deserve this basic service and the Northwest Arctic Borough is ready to assume the responsibility [for the VPSO program]. The borough already partners with the Alaska State Troopers, the Kotzebue Police Department, and continues to meet with DPS to succeed. She related that the borough wants to be

proactive in crime prevention by providing public awareness, ease, and involvement. She mentioned using local elders to teach discipline, responsibility, self control, and leadership. As a community-based organization, the borough is looking at preventing crimes and building a healthier community. In 2007 the borough hosted a law enforcement summit with DPS during which the statewide needs for public safety were reviewed in order to glean ideas as to what would work in terms of public safety in the Northwest Arctic Borough and the region as a whole. Recommendations from the communities will be reviewed by the commission and the activities will be prioritized in order to achieve long-sustaining public safety in the villages. Ms. Whiting then relayed that there is a congressional appropriation from the US Department of Justice in the amount of \$500,000 to the Northwest Arctic Borough to provide VPSO training and planning opportunities. In conclusion, Ms. Whiting reiterated support for HB 106.

[9:15:08 AM](#)

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

[9:15:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved to report CSHB 106, Version LS0402\E, Luckhaupt, 2/25/09, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 106(CRA) was reported from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[9:15:47 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:15 a.m. to 9:21 a.m.

HJR 15-CHANGE NAME OF MT. MCKINLEY TO DENALI

[9:21:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 15, Urging the United States Congress to change the name of Mount McKinley to Denali.

[9:22:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT KAWASAKI, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as the sponsor of HJR 15, relayed how picturesque Mount

McKinley and the surrounding area is. The peak has been around for millions of years and the Alaska Natives appropriately named it Denali, "The High One." The peak was renamed in 1896 by William Dickey after presidential candidate McKinley, who did become the president. About 18 months after he became president, President McKinley was fatally shot. This was a president who had no apparent connection to the state and never visited the state. Representative Kawasaki said that he introduced HJR 15 to encourage Congress to reconsider naming the peak "Denali," which would restore the name back to Alaskans. He reminded members that in the 1970s the attempt to change the name of McKinley National Park to Denali National Park was successful. Since 1975 Ohio Congressman Ralph Regula has blocked the name change of the peak. Congressman Regula is from Canton, Ohio, which is the birth place of President McKinley. The retirement of Congressman Regula would seem to provide an opening with regard to renaming the peak. Representative Kawasaki opined that it's appropriate that the name be given by the Alaskan people. He further opined that although he respects the Office of the President, McKinley already has a lot of things named after him. In closing, Representative Kawasaki related his belief that it's time for the Alaskan people to name their own landmarks. He acknowledged that although HJR 15 isn't the most important resolution, the message it sends Congress is as grand as the mountain itself: that Alaska should name its landmarks.

[9:27:16 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved that the committee adopt HJR 15, Version A. There being no objection, HJR 15 was before the committee.

[9:27:59 AM](#)

DAVID MOORE, Member, Alaska Historical Commission, Office of History & Archaeology, Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, related support for HJR 15. He explained that the Alaska Historical Commission is the official board that reviews geographic name proposals prior to those proposals being submitted to the US State Board on Geographic Names. The Alaska Historical Commission and its predecessor board have voted in favor of changing the name to Denali, primarily due to the belief that Alaskans should be able to name their places. Mr. Moore related that the commission's Native member supports HJR 15, but requests that the resolution identify the dialect of Athabascan that the name Denali comes from rather than refer to the Athabascan language.

[9:30:16 AM](#)

ROBERT CHARLIE, Executive Director, Cultural Heritage and Education Institute, related his support of HJR 15 and noted that "Denali" is the proper spelling. The peak has been a landmark for the Athabaskan people for thousands of years. He noted that back in 1982 he was one of the individuals who worked with US Senator Stevens to gather signatures in support of changing the name to Denali.

[9:32:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MUNOZ, upon determining no one else wished to testify or had questions, public testimony was closed.

[9:32:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved that the committee adopt Amendment 1, which read:

Delete at page 1, lines 7-9
Add the following at page 1, lines 7-9:

WHEREAS "Denali" translates to "The High One" from the Koyukon dialect of the Athabaskan people and is indicative of its worldwide recognition as the highest mountain on the continent of North America, standing at 20,320 feet; and

There being no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[9:33:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON moved that the committee adopt Amendment 2, which read:

Delete at page 2, lines 1-2
Add the following at page 2, line 1-2:

WHEREAS the Alaska Board of Geographical Names officially recognizes the name of the mountain as "Denali"; and

There being no objection, Amendment 2 was adopted.

[9:33:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HERRON noted his support for HJR 15. He then informed the committee that President McKinley was a decorated Civil War veteran who served in Congress and was the governor of Ohio. President McKinley was especially supportive of gold miners. President McKinley ran on a platform in 1896 in support of the gold standard. Interestingly, President McKinley believed in pluralism, which is the protection of minority ethnic groups in society. William Dickey, a gold miner on the Susitna, wrote an article promoting the gold standard. Because of the gold in Alaska, Mr. Dickey named the peak in honor of President McKinley. Therefore, Co-Chair Herron opined that it was topical and made sense at the time. Co-Chair Herron then highlighted the importance of discussing the resolution.

[9:37:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER remarked that as a legislator she has learned that everything is important to someone.

[9:37:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA opined that HJR 15 hits the heart of Alaskans in many ways. Furthermore, Co-Chair Herron's comments regarding President McKinley seem to indicate that President McKinley would've supported HJR 15.

[9:39:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT commented that introducing HJR 15 now is timely to as it's the 50th anniversary of Alaska's statehood. She related her support for HJR 15, which she said isn't trivial.

[9:40:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved to report HJR 15, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHJR 15(CRA) was reported from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[9:40:48 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.