

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 4, 2009

1:52 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Hollis French, Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair  
Senator Kim Elton  
Senator Lesil McGuire  
Senator Gene Therriault

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

Confirmation Hearings

Select Committee on Legislative Ethics

Herman G Walker, Jr. - Anchorage

Dennis "Skip" Cook - Fairbanks

CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record.

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Herman G Walker, Jr.  
Anchorage, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Select Committee on  
Legislative Ethics

Dennis "Skip" Cook  
Fairbanks, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Select Committee on  
Legislative Ethics.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR HOLLIS FRENCH** called the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:52 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Elton, McGuire, Wielechowski and French. Senator Therriault arrived soon thereafter.

### CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

1:52:55 PM

CHAIR FRENCH announced the committee would hear from Herman Walker, Jr. and Dennis "Skip" Cook who are nominees to the Select Committee on Legislative Ethics. He asked Mr. Walker to tell the committee about himself and why he wants to serve.

HERMAN G. WALKER, Jr., Nominee to the Select Committee on Legislative Ethics, said this will be his third term and the primary reason he would like to serve another term is that this is an end of an era. A lot of rule changes have occurred in the ethics code and he feels that continuity and historical knowledge will be particularly important during the next three years.

CHAIR FRENCH said he couldn't agree more and he appreciates that he is willing to continue to serve. He noted that he too has served on the ethics committee and knows that it is not an easy job. The state is lucky to have you, he said. "If I remember correctly it doesn't pay you a nickel for doing that does it?"

MR. WALKER said, "No and I'm losing money as I sit here now."

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SENATOR ELTON thanked him for his service and asked how he has dealt with the client issue.

MR. WALKER replied it hasn't been a problem. He had been asked to represent individuals associated with Veco Corporation when that issue came down but he declined. "Other than that, I have not really had any issues," he said.

SENATOR MCGUIRE thanked him for his service and asked what thoughts or direction the ethics committee might give with respect to constituent advocacy—the practice of legislators advocating for their constituents and not knowing where the line really is.

MR. WALKER replied it's a difficult question but the two issues are to look at the statute and define the term "benefit" as it relates to constituent services and then to determine how that

relates to a legislator using their office for the private benefit of another.

CHAIR FRENCH found no further questions and solicited a motion.

SENATOR MCGUIRE moved to forward the name Herman G. Walker, Jr. to the full body for confirmation to the Select Committee on Legislative Ethics.

CHAIR FRENCH found no objection and announced that the name Herman G. Walker, Jr. would be forwarded to the full body. Doing so does not reflect intent by any of the members to vote for or against the individual in any further sessions.

CHAIR FRENCH welcomed Mr. Cook to the committee and asked if he or Mr. Walker had served longer.

DENNIS "SKIP" COOK, Nominee to the Select Committee on Legislative Ethics, introduced himself and said he has served longer.

CHAIR FRENCH thanked him for his lengthy service and asked him to tell the committee how long he has served, something about his background and why he is seeking reconfirmation.

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SENATOR THERRIAULT joined the committee.

MR. COOK said he's been on the committee since 1998, which has given him a chance to look at the ethics statutes as they existed initially and how they have evolved over the years. Some of the changes are due to the fact that the committee found areas that needed to be better defined or that needed exceptions. He conceded that "There is still some of that difficulty with the act as you just discussed a few moments ago." Over the years he has gained insight into the working of the Legislature and has enjoyed his association with the public members and legislators on the committee. He believes that continuity is important and the way the committee is structured there is a fair amount of turn over. He's been encouraged to stay on by the administration and some committee members who feel it would be useful. "I enjoy the work and would like to continue serving," he said.

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CHAIR FRENCH said he believes it's extremely important to have continuity. The public depends on legislators to police

themselves and the ethics committee is a crucial part of that. I thank you, he said. He found no further questions and commented that the lack of questions indicates enormous trust and respect.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI moved to forward the name Dennis "Skip" Cook to the full body for confirmation to the Select Committee on Legislative Ethics.

CHAIR FRENCH found no objection and announced that that the name Dennis "Skip" Cook will be forwarded to the full body. Doing so does not reflect intent by any of the members to vote for or against the individual in any further sessions.

SENATOR THERRIAULT disclosed that Mr. Cook is in a business partnership with his wife.

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CHAIR FRENCH adjourned the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee.