

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 21, 2012

3:37 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Donald Olson, Chair
Senator Albert Kookesh
Senator Linda Menard
Senator Johnny Ellis

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Thomas Wagoner

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 147

"An Act relating to an Alaska Water and Sewer Task Force; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 147

SHORT TITLE: WATER AND SEWER TASK FORCE

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) KOOKESH

01/17/12	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/6/12
01/17/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/12	(S)	CRA, FIN

WITNESS REGISTER

DOROTHY SHOCKLEY, Staff
Senator Albert Kookesh
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 147.

BILL GRIFFITH, Manager
Facility Programs
Department of Environmental Conservation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Neutral on SB 147.

MARY SCHLOSSER, representing herself
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 147.

JOY HUNINGTON, representing herself
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 147.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:37:25 PM](#)

CHAIR DONALD OLSON called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:37 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kookesh, Menard and Chair Olson.

SB 147-WATER AND SEWER TASK FORCE

[3:37:37 PM](#)

CHAIR OLSON announced the consideration of SB 147.

[3:38:06 PM](#)

DOROTHY SHOCKLEY, staff for Senator Kookesh, Alaska State Legislature, said the bill would create a nine member Alaska Water and Sewer Task Force (WSTF) to address the estimated 6,000 homes in the state without "Safe Water and Sanitation Systems" (SWSS). She said the state had only met the required amount of matching federal funds at 19 to 25 percent for rural projects. She said most money had gone into facility upgrades and maintenance rather than new projects.

She said WSTF would establish an accurate number of homes without SWSS; establish a spectrum of need and prioritize; explore alternative self-sustaining SWSS; research other artic nations' SWSS; coordinate funding in agencies that provide services and oversee SWSS construction projects; investigate and access past SWSS projects and service providers; meet with state and federal agencies and departments on regulations and funding requirements; and funding requirements to streamline projects. She said WSTF would be a nine member task force; two from the Senate, one appointed from the Bush Caucus, two from the House, one from the public with civil engineering credentials, one representative from an appropriate federal agency, one representative from the appropriate state agency and two rural Alaska residents.

3:40:00 PM

SENATOR ELLIS joined the meeting.

3:41:23 PM

MS SHOCKLEY said WSTF would meet in four rural communities and attend the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Convention in Anchorage. She said a report would be submitted by January, 2013 to the legislature.

SENATOR MENARD asked if potential WSTF candidates had shown interest. She noted that former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens had supported the same cause. She stated her support for WSTF.

MS SHOCKLEY answered that communities and organizations have shown support. She said engineers have stated a willingness to help.

SENATOR MENARD asked for additional information on the fiscal note.

3:44:30 PM

MS SHOCKLEY answered that the fiscal note was \$107,000 for the five task force trips and a part time administrator. She said the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) submitted a fiscal note for \$6,300 to accompany WSTF.

SENATOR MENARD asked to clarify that a part-time person would be hired to assist WSTF.

MS SHOCKLEY answered yes.

CHAIR OLSON asked how the 6,000 households were geographically distributed throughout the state.

MS SHOCKLEY answered that the distribution regions were, Yukon Kuskokwim: 32 percent, Interior: 19 percent, South Central: 14 percent, Norton Sound: 10 percent, Kenai/Prince William Sound: 10 percent and Other: 15 percent. She said within the "Other Region," Artic Slope: 9 percent, Northwest Arctic: 32 percent, Southeast: 20 percent, Bristol Bay: 20 percent, Copper River: 13 percent and Aleutian Pribilof: 6 percent.

3:48:26 PM

MS SHOCKLEY said the regional distribution of First Service Needs (FSN) for SWSS service to homes not previously served, Yukon Kuskokwim: 69 percent, Norton Sound: 14 percent, Interior:

10 percent, Northwest Arctic: 6 percent. She said FSN should be targeted with a list of projects and maintenance requirements.

CHAIR OLSON asked what specific health concerns were associated with poor SWSS in rural Alaska.

MS SHOCKLEY answered that one issue was respiratory problems.

CHAIR OLSON commented that hepatitis was his major concern due to viral transmission.

MS SHOCKLEY said a rural community had a breakout of Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA).

[3:50:57 PM](#)

CHAIR OLSON said projects were getting more expensive due to diminishing federal funds and inaccessibility. He asked if there were alternative solutions for SWSS projects in villages that need help.

MS SHOCKLEY answered that anything was possible and other arctic countries had done it.

[3:52:04 PM](#)

SENATOR KOOKESH commented that the U.S. government was going to repair all of the Iraq's SWSS. He said the priority should be on the 6,000 Alaskan homes and the rest of the U.S. rural families that do not have proper SWSS. He said the WSTF would not solve all of the problems, but reducing 50 percent of the homes without SWSS would be a great accomplishment. He said having a list of priorities from WSTF for legislatures was the intent of the bill.

SENATOR MENARD asked about the WSTF sunset in 2013.

MS. SHOCKLEY answered that a report would be provided in 2013 and there was no sunset. She said she was hopeful that WSTF would continue until all homes in Alaska had adequate SWSS.

SENATOR MENARD commented on her concern that WSTF did not have enough time to provide a report to the legislature.

[3:54:41 PM](#)

CHAIR OLSON commented that the WSTF report would be done in less than a year. He asked what the WSTF report would contain and how the state would be involved.

MS SHOCKLEY answered that the WSTF report would provide details on needs and priorities for SWSS.

[3:56:29 PM](#)

SENATOR KOOKESH commented that former Governor Knowles stated that the "honey bucket" should be placed in a museum. He noted that the Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO) program benefited from implementing a task force. He stated that the \$107,000 fiscal note was a minuscule appropriation.

SENATOR MENARD noted that Senator Kookesh served as an AFN board member. She asked what the AFN priorities were regarding SWSS.

SENATOR KOOKESH answered that SWSS was a top priority and noted that AFN would back WSTF.

CHAIR OLSON asked about technological advances in SWSS that could benefit rural Alaska.

[3:59:57 PM](#)

BILL GRIFFITH, Facility Programs Manager, Department of Environmental Conservation, Anchorage, said less than 25 percent of rural households had SWSS 30 years ago and 75 percent today. He said DEC was now looking at the most challenging communities to serve in a sustainable way.

CHAIR OLSON asked how much of the rural budget for SWSS was federally funded and what percentage of state funds went to larger municipalities rather than rural communities.

MR. GRIFFITH said 75 percent of the SWSS was federally funded with a required match of 25 percent from the state. He said federal funds have declined over the past seven years and state funds have declined proportionally. He said the state provided 100 percent grant match funding for larger municipalities and annual appropriations were independent of federal funding. He noted that communities had to provide a match for state funding and the amount varied based on the population of the community.

[4:03:44 PM](#)

CHAIR OLSON said the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded \$23.6 million for SWSS. He asked if the USDA funds found their way to rural SWSS projects.

MR. GRIFFITH answered yes. He said the USDA money was part of the federal money that required the state to match.

[4:04:38 PM](#)

MS. SHOCKLEY commented that it was not impossible to get SWSS to all rural communities.

MARY SCHLOSSER, representing herself, Juneau, said the federal government had spent over \$2.6 billion for Iraq's SWSS. She referenced her home village was still using honey buckets.

CHAIR OLSON commented that additional generations should not have to continue using honey buckets.

[4:08:22 PM](#)

JOY HUNINGTON, representing herself, said she grew up in villages that did not have SWSS. She said Alaska had not kept up with other countries and voiced her concern regarding health issues. She said she was exposed to MRSA during her travels to rural Alaska. She said a lack of SWSS was leading to rural out-migration and advocated WSTF.

[4:12:55 PM](#)

CHAIR OLSON asked about her MRSA experience.

MS. HUNINGTON answered that MRSA was a deadly staph infection.

[SB 147 was held in committee.]

[4:15:48 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Olson adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee at 4:15 p.m.