

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 3, 2014
6:03 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Meyer called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Pete Kelly, Co-Chair
Senator Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair
Senator Anna Fairclough, Vice-Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Mike Dunleavy
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Mary Graham, Self, Juneau; Robert Claus, President, Craig City School District, Juneau; Bridget Smith, Self, Juneau; Ann Gifford, Self, Juneau; Mary Hakala, Self, Juneau; Joan Pardes, Self, Juneau; Geron Brown, Self, Juneau; Allison Smith, Self, Juneau; Paul D. Beran, Self, Juneau.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Jeff Harris, Self, Bethel; Barbara Haney, Self, Fairbanks; Lance Roberts, Self, Fairbanks; Christopher Benshoof, Self, Fairbanks; Fran March, Self, Kodiak; Kathy Simpler, Self, Kodiak; Betty Mactavish, Self, Kodiak; Gayle Harbo, Self, Fairbanks; Robin Feinman, Self, Fairbanks; Mike Brax, Self, Fairbanks; Chris Villano, Self, Fairbanks; Mari Jorgenson, Self, Fairbanks; Barbara Parker, Board Member, Delta/Greely School District, Delta Junction; Valerie Brooks, Self, Ketchikan; Jake Todd, Good Taste, Anchorage; William Theuer, Self, Anchorage; Terrie Gottstein, Self, Anchorage; Kevin McGee, National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People, Anchorage; Ted Angstadt, Self, Anchorage; Wanda Greene-Laws, President, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People-Anchorage, Anchorage; Alison Arians, Self, Anchorage; Valerie Waldrop, Self, Anchorage; Deena Mitchell, Self, Anchorage; Joe Boyle, President, Mat-Su Education Association, Mat-Su; Marsha Burns, Self, Anchorage; Lynn Highland, Self, Anchorage; William McLeod, Superintendent, Dillingham City School District, Dillingham; Amy Bollenbach, Self, Homer; Katie Finn, Self, Anchor Point; Arlene Ronda, Self, Homer; William Bruu, Self, Fairview; Peter Scott, Self, Wasilla; Kristina Tornquist, Self, Palmer; James Chesbroser, Self, Wasilla; Tracey Martin, Self, Wasilla; Ernie Kirby, Self, Palmer; Emily Forstner, Self, Palmer; Gretchen Wehmhoff, Self, Chugiak; Sean Reilly, Self, Palmer; Tim Walters, Self, Wasilla; Cheryl Romatz, KPEA, Soldotna; LaDawn Druce, Vice President, NEA Alaska, Soldotna; Henry Anderson, Self, Kenai; Cathleen Rolph, KPEA, Soldotna; Hugh Hays, Self, Soldotna; Marge Hays, Self, Soldotna; Brian Schilling, Self, Eagle River; David Nees, Self, Anchorage; Joelle Hall, Self, Eagle River; Michael Chambers, Chair, Alaska Libertarian Party, Anchorage; Sarah Davies, Self, Anchorage; Nora Herzog, Students With a Voice, Anchorage; Andrea Lang, Self, Anchorage; Robert McClory, Self, Ketchikan; Mark Roseberry, North Slope Borough Education Association, Barrow; Bobby Lasalle, Self, Fairbanks; Michelle Thomas, Self, Fairbanks; Wendy Demers, Self, Fairbanks; Aaron Lojewski, Self, Fairbanks; Don Gray, Self, Fairbanks; Rebecca Baxter, Self, Fairbanks; Tammy Smith, Self, Fairbanks; Robert Taylor, Self, Anchorage; Neva Reece, Self, Anchorage; Marilyn Pillifant, Self, Anchorage; Patrick LeMay, Self, Anchorage; Tamara Krus-Roselius, Self, Anchorage; Mark Mitchell, Aleutians East Education Association, King Cove; Dixie Hood, Self, Juneau; Denise Koch, Self, Anchorage; Jane Yokoyama, Self, Anchorage; Mike Coons, Self, Palmer; Glenn Biegel, Self, Anchorage; Annette Barnett, Self, Tuntutuliak; Tina Wegener, Self, Sterling; Virginia Rusch, Self, Anchorage; Curtis Watkins, Self, Fairbanks; Patti Higgins, Self, Anchorage; George Pierce, Self, Kasilof; Richard Onorato, Self, Anchorage; Posie Boggs, Self, Anchorage; Linda Hulen, Self, Anchorage; Patrick Montague, Self, Anchorage; Matt Miller, Self, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

SJR 9 CONST. AM: EDUCATION FUNDING

SJR 9 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sjr9

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 9

Proposing amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska relating to state aid for education.

Co-Chair Meyer discussed the meeting's agenda.

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MARY GRAHAM, SELF, JUNEAU, spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and believed that the drafters of the Alaska State Constitution had gotten it right that the state was responsible for public education. She referenced comments that passing SJR 9 would not mean that Alaska would have vouchers, but opined that unless there was agenda to create the ability for state and local public money to be provided for private and religious school attendance, there would be no need for the legislation. She related that recent research showed that many factors were responsible for students not succeeding and that choice of school did not overcome the number 1 predictor of school failure, which was poverty. She thought the state needed to be focusing its limited energies towards making sure that its public schools could meet the challenges of modern education, particularly during a time of declining revenues.

ROBERT CLAUS, PRESIDENT, CRAIG CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, JUNEAU, expressed opposition to SJR 9 and thought that it removed accountability for spent state dollars for a "false" illusion of choice. He discussed the wide range of options that Craig's schools offered and opined that the voucher system would not do nothing for the majority of school districts, particularly among Rural Alaskan communities that did not have a large enough population base to support private schools. He concluded that this was not the time for a constitutional change.

BRIDGET SMITH, SELF, JUNEAU, testified strongly against SJR 9 and opined that public funds should not be used for private and religious schools. She thought that changing the state's constitution to accommodate SJR 9's idea would allow the separation of church and state to disappear from

education and believed it could represent a slippery slope. She thought that administering the resolution's program would be complex and far more expensive than the current public-school system. She thought that when public funding was involved in private uses, every single private and religious school should be subject to scrutiny and be vetted and approved; furthermore, administrative oversight would have to be created. She offered that the role of the public education system in a democracy was crucial and that part of the civic mission of public schools was to educate all students as citizens. She offered that public schools taught people how to be critical thinkers, civic participants, and how to commit to and work towards the common good. She concluded that public schools were created in part to provide an equitable education to all children and that having a well education populace was essential for the common good; this could only be guaranteed through a public school system.

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ANN GIFFORD, SELF, JUNEAU, expressed opposition to SJR 9 and hoped that the state would instead focus on strengthening its public school system. She offered that public schools were provided for in the state's constitution because, as a society, everyone benefited when all children received a basic education; whereas, everyone was hurt when children did not get a basic education. She opined that in Alaska, most children were only able to get a good education through the public schools. She thought that broadening the choice options so that some students could use public money to attend private school only helped the students that were able to access those options. She pointed out that the students who needed the help the most often lived in remote parts of Alaska where there were no private schools or they lived in a situation where they lacked the proper support to help take advantage of a private choice option. She was concerned that vouchers or other private school choices would not benefit the students that utilized them and referenced failures of similar programs. She pointed out that there was less accountability about how the money was spent in a voucher system. She thought that when public money was spent for education, people were entitled to expect safe schools that did not discriminate, provided due process, used certified teachers, and taught a curriculum that met state standards.

MARY HAKALA, SELF, JUNEAU, spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and discussed her family's personal experience navigating through the school system in Alaska. She believed in options, but believed in them within the public school framework where students' and parents' rights were respected and safeguarded and where there were standards that were met. She thought that ultimately, SJR 9 would lead to vouchers and did not assume that it only involved access to correspondence and course materials. She believed that public education was the great melting pot of America and that it taught children to remember common ground when looking at differences in each other. She thought that vouchers led to ideological enclaves and surrounded students with resources, people, and perspectives that were often very singular.

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JOAN PARDES, SELF, JUNEAU, testified in strong opposition to SJR 9. She thought that the public education system was not broke but was underfunded. She stated that nothing could succeed without reliable resources and that if the legislators used all of their resources to fix the current public education system, there would be some good results. She thought that the resolution would splinter the resources that were available to educators. She opined that it would wonderful be if the legislature could put resources into the current system to fix it before other options were discussed.

Vice-Chair Fairclough inquired if Ms. Pardes worked for the school system. Ms. Pardes replied in the negative.

GERON BROWN, SELF, JUNEAU, spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and related his previous experience teaching at a private school. He recalled how the school system that he had worked in had faced a similar proposal, but that there had been opposition to the idea because of concerns of state oversight; the private school was successful because the people that supported it had a tremendous interest in the school. He recalled that the private school did not have transportation, special education services, or free lunches. He did not feel that SJR 9 would improve the overall education system. He felt that the legislation would improve the education system for some people, while diverted already depleted resources away from the current public system. He opined that while the current system was

not perfect, it had equitable access. He thought the state should focus on having the students, families, teachers, legislators, community leaders, parents, and others provide and show support for the school system.

Senator Dunleavy inquired if Mr. Brown was a member of the National Education Association (NEA). Mr. Brown replied in the affirmative.

ALLISON SMITH, SELF, JUNEAU, testified in opposition to SJR 9 and shared that equity in education was an issue for her. She thought that the students who would benefit from the legislation were the ones that already had homes and parental support that helped them navigate the system. She noted that the resolution would allow charter schools to spend more than the amount of the vouchers and offered that it could potentially create more of a class system. She observed that private and religious schools could discriminate based on gender, religion, income, standardized test scores, special needs, and behavior and opined that tax payer money should be going to a free and appropriate education for all students.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Ms. Smith was member of the NEA. Ms. Smith replied in the affirmative.

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JEFF HARRIS, SELF, BETHEL (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and thought that a constitutional change should happen in response to or in the prevention of a grave danger. He wondered what had changed that made the amendment necessary. He thought that the real danger with the resolution was regarding what happened in 5, 10, or 20 years. He discussed his own education in the public school system and how he used the experienced gained there in his life. He thought that it was important to have as many options and opportunities as possible in the public-school system. He pointed out that not everyone would be a CEO of a company or the owner of their own place and that the state needed people who knew how to work. He thought that the state would miss out on a lot of students by diluting money that the public-education system received.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Mr. Harris was a member of the NEA. Mr. Harris replied in the affirmative.

Co-Chair Meyer noted for the record that there were a number of people testifying in opposition to and in support of SJR 9 in members' packets. He relayed that the committee read the written testimony that was submitted.

BARBARA HANEY, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9. She related that the city of Oklahoma had 35 bible colleges and wondered how many were in Alaska. She opined that the Sheldon Jackson Decision had cost the state enormously regarding higher education. She supported how the resolution addressed higher education, but expressed concerns with how it addressed K-12. She stated that the state had previously had choice in the form of "purchase orders" and offered that every home-school mother in the state knew about them. She thought that purchase orders and vouchers were the same things and noted that the state had taken away the ability already with the adoption of the common-core standards. She thought that the common-core standards needed to be re-drafted and the state should restore the choice in education that was previously there.

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LANCE ROBERTS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), urged his support of SJR 9 and thought that competition was a good thing. He recalled how de-regulation and competition had greatly improved the price of long distance phone calls in the past and thought that the legislation would help bring equitable access to everyone. He noted that in other states, similar legislation had enabled those of lower income to be able to make a choice that they could not afford previously; he predicted that the legislation would help bring equitable access to education in Alaska. He offered that the legislature should let the people of the state decide on the issue and wanted to see more competition regarding education. He reported that Fairbanks was currently spending \$16,000 per student, which was one of the highest costs per student in the nation and opined that the state was not getting the results from those high costs.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Mr. Roberts was a member of the NEA. Mr. Roberts replied in the negative.

Senator Bishop discussed a recent News Miner article that showed that the Fairbanks Northstar Borough School District

had the lowest scores of high school graduates who needed remedial math and English when they entered the University of Alaska's system; he clarified that the district was the best performer in the state regarding not needing remediation in those categories.

CHRISTOPHER BENSHOOF, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and related that it would open the door for a voucher system that would allow public money to fund private schools. He opined that Alaska's current charter-school law was the best in the nation and allowed for charter schools to be created within the umbrella of the public school system; this enabled new educational opportunities to emerge that were still held accountable to the same standards of accreditation, teacher qualifications, and graduation requirements as their public counterparts. He thought that considering how the changes would benefit students was important and opined that students in Alaska already had a lot of options. He offered that redirecting funds away from public schools would negatively affect already constrained budgets and created a private and expensive market for schooling that would be largely unaccountable. He thought that teachers around the state were excited at prospects of improving student achievement, but that the resolution would only hurt the quality of student experience and teaching expertise in the education system.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Mr. Benshoof was a member of the NEA. Mr. Benshoof replied in the affirmative.

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FRAN MARCH, SELF, KODIAK (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SJR 9. She thought that the state should go back and re-look at how public schools were funded. She referenced two articles in the Anchorage Daily News that discussed poverty levels and the inequities that existed between different children and their home lives. She expounded that some students did not have the advantages that came with children who had a stay-at-home parent or more finances supporting them. She hoped that the state would redirect its thinking and take a deeper look at what was going on in Alaska's schools and what type of action was needed to make sure that every student succeeded. She added that she was a member of NEA, but was not part of the political action committee.

KATHY SIMPLER, SELF, KODIAK (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SJR 9 and stated for the record that she was a member of the NEA. She thought that opening the constitution to allow school vouchers was not the intention of the state's forefathers. She stated that public education in the state was for all Alaskan children and was the last equalizer. She believed that public money should not go to religious or private schools and that doing so prevented public institutions from reducing class sizes and providing essential classroom resources. She offered that voucher schools were not held to any standards and were able to pick their students, which she thought would lead to segregation. She urged the support of Alaska's public education system.

BETTY MACTAVISH, SELF, KODIAK (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and thought that the constitution should remain as it was written. She quoted from the Alaska State Constitution. She referenced a "neo-conservative" movement across the nation to take public-tax dollars and redirect them to fund public/private partnership under the name of publicly funded school choice. She stated that charter schools had no elected boards and opined that the legislation would lead to Alaskans more readily accept unelected boards in all areas of the government. She cautioned that the resolution amounted to taxation without representation. She reported school that funding was based on enrollment and that more charter schools would take funding away from traditional K-12 schools. She thought that it would be better to improve existing public schools instead and observed that charter schools targeted the students that they wanted to enroll and not all of Alaska's children. She thought that the resolution would result in less money getting into the classroom at a time when Alaska's schools were struggling to adjust to the latest unfunded mandate of the new Alaskan standards. She concluded that charter school provided less transparency and diversity. She wanted tax payer dollars to be put into good use within the public-school system.

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Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Ms. Mactavish was a member of the NEA. Ms. Mactavish replied in the negative, but stated that she had taught in Oregon schools about 12 years prior.

GAYLE HARBO, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SJR 9 and shared that she was proud of the state's public school system. She hoped that people would visit the public schools often to see the variety of programs that were offered to every child. She discussed the successes of her family in the public school system. She opined that Alaska's public schools offered every possible opportunity and believed that the state did not need outside groups directing Alaska in how to run its business.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Ms. Harbo was a member of the NEAA. Ms. Harbo replied in the affirmative.

ROBIN FEINMAN, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), expressed opposition to SJR 9 and stated that she believed in public education. She opined that a forward thinking society recognized that an educated populace was in everyone's interest. She thought that in a world of dwindling resources, the state did not have the luxury to foster the creativity of "only the economically well off," but rather it needed to look ahead to tap the intellectual potential of all of its citizens. She believed that a voucher system would be a step away from the state's goal to offer educational opportunities to everyone. She thought that siphoning public funds into private businesses would negatively affect the successes of traditional public schools and their students. She thought that given the current discussion of more accountability for public schools, it would be hardly justified to propose funneling more money into private institutions that were held less accountable. She opined that it was a fallacy that a voucher system would put the power of choice with the parents, but offered that the system would put the power of choice in the hands of the private and religious schools that could hand pick the best and the brightest students; furthermore, it would result in requiring public schools to do way more with way less resources. She thought that the legislation was not equitable for all students and that instead of taking away money from public schools, they should be adequately funded and held to higher standards.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Ms. Feinman was a member of the NEA. Ms. Feinman replied in the affirmative.

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MIKE BRAX, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in support of SJR 9. He discussed a poll that had been conducted for the legislature the prior month and stated that it had indicated that 84 percent of Alaskans supported amending the constitution to allow a school choice program in Alaska. He thought that the resolution would give Alaska the opportunity to debate the direction that it wanted to go. He noted that there had been a lot of comments on the resolution's effects on the public school system, but offered that no one knew whether it take away or give more money to the school districts. He stated that the only question before the committee was whether it wanted to allow Alaskans to vote on the issue. He opined that that a vote against the resolution was not a vote defending public education, but was in fact a vote to restrict the opportunities for public education. He thought it had been shown that allowing consumers to be part of the decision making process brought those consumers into the game; he offered that the computer and the telecommunications industries were examples of this. He concluded that having the ability to have more choice and have a decentralized consumer-driven industry would only improve education.

Co-Chair Kelly inquired if Mr. Brax was a member of the NEA. Mr. Brax replied in the negative.

Co-Chair Kelly related to the committee that he would not be asking further testifiers if they were members of the NEA or not. He pointed out that no one's testimony was more or less valid depending on whether they were members of the NEA, but that he was trying to get a sense of where people were coming from on the resolution.

Co-Chair Meyer agreed with the previous testifier that the only issue before the committee was whether to give Alaskans the opportunity to vote on the issue.

CHRIS VILLANO, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9. She discussed her membership in various organizations and related that she was very active in her community. She reported that she was opposed to the resolution because Alaska's constitution stated that public funds needed to be used for public schools. She thought that public funds should not be diverted to un-regulated, unaccountable private, secular, and religious schools. She was excited about the potential of education and reform that the governor had suggested, but offered that reform

could not take place in over-crowded classrooms. She stated that Alaska's school districts were experiencing severe cuts to teacher positions that would result in class sizes increasing by 3 students next year. She stated that she had taught in Catholic schools, but was currently a public school teacher. She currently had 29 students in a class at a Title I school where children with special needs were attending. She referenced a recent non-partisan legislative research report that had indicated that vouchers could cost upward \$100 million, which concerned her. She thought that Alaska needed to take care of its public schools because they serviced all the children of the state, especially those with the greatest need.

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MARI JORGENSON, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9. She had taught for 34 years, 25 of which had been in public schools; prior to that, she had been teaching in Catholic schools. She offered the due to funding cuts, she had 6 4th graders and 19 5th graders in her classroom. She pointed out that even with the vouchers that were in the resolution, her low-income students would still be unable to afford private schooling. She reported that the resolution was making her fear that the state was recreating segregation. She offered a study of the current voucher program as proof that the vouchers did not work. She opined that Alaska's public schools were not broken, but that they were sadly underfunded.

BARBARA PARKER, BOARD MEMBER, DELTA/GREELY SCHOOL DISTRICT, DELTA JUNCTION (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9 and pointed out that it would remove wording in the constitution that specified that no public funds would go towards the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution. She was a firm supporter of school choice for parents who knew what type of institution would be the best suited for educating their child. She expressed concerns that public funds to an educational entity currently required accountability and pointed out that the state already had multiple statutes that required strict accountability. She wondered if the state would be dealing with private entities and attempt to make them accountable because Alaskans wanted to know if the state money was well spent. She further mused if the state would require these private or religious schools to hire only certificated teachers who were highly qualified

in the subject that they were teaching; furthermore, in the future, would it require religious schools to hire teachers without bias to their religious preference. She wondered if the state would require that all employees of religious schools submit to background checks or whether it would require private and religious schools to adopt the state's English, language, and math standards, be assessed by those standards, meet some basic graduation requirements, and report under the new Alaska State Performance index. She urged the committee to consider her above questions because changing the constitution was a serious step that should be thoroughly and transparently examined in public before it is placed on the ballot; this would ensure for fair and equitable accountability, but also would benefit private or religious schools that may not want interference from the state in the future.

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VALERIE BROOKS, SELF, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), expressed opposition to SJR 9. She explained that she was an Alaskan tax payer who supported public money for public schools and that she did not support altering the constitution. She discussed the prior testimony of Diane Ravitch, who was a former Assistant-Secretary of Education for Research nationally, on March 1, 2012 before the Senate Education Committee hearing on SJR 9. She quoted Ms. Ravitch's testimony as follows:

I understand the impulse behind vouchers. It is fundamentally an anti-government, anti-public education, pro-privatization sentiment.

I am opposed to vouchers.

I believe they will undermine and destroy public education.

I believe, based on my many years of study, that public education is one of the essential institutions of a democratic society-certainly of this very diverse democratic society. And we must not sacrifice the...Public schools are the institutions that teach us to live together.

Ms. Brooks continued her testimony. She asserted that private schools did not address the needs of special-needs

students and were not publicly accountable. She opined that vouchers did not mean school choice and urged the retention and increases in funding for public schools. She asserted that Alaska's constitution had been specifically written to preserve the state's democracy and ensure that Alaskans retain public access to public services. She did not support changing the constitution or public money being spent on private schools, but did support public money going to public schools.

JAKE TODD, GOOD TASTE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against the resolution and discussed his career, personal politics, and Alaskan roots. He offered that amending the constitution in the way the resolution recommended was a mistake. He asserted that there was no peer-reviewed research that showed that vouchers had increased student learning. He admitted that there were some "bought and paid for" articles that claimed that vouchers did increase learning, but that their logic was full of holes. He related that charter schools in Alaska were now public and open to everyone thought that passing the legislation would be mistake.

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WILLIAM THEUER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke against SJR 9. He agreed with Alaska's constitution that no money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or private educational institution and that public resources should go to public service; furthermore, any modification to that language was unwarranted and could lead to unforeseen consequences. He opined that it was concerning that the committee may have suggested that it had not considered what the resolution's changes might be.

TERRIE GOTTSTEIN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against the resolution and disclosed that she was not a member of the NEA. She was a parent with children in the Anchorage School District and spoke in strong support of public education. She pointed to California as an example of a state where parents had to spend a significant amount of money to send their children to good schools. She did not support public dollars going to private or religious education. She pointed to private Islamic, Jewish, and Christian schools as examples. She stressed that the state was facing serious underfunding of the

education system at present and discussed the myriad options provided to children with different learning styles.

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KEVIN MCGEE, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke on behalf of the NAACP Anchorage branch and stated his opposition to the resolution. He opined that the legislation was an attempt to cut more money from the public school system and that public schools already had inadequate base student allocation (BSA) funding. He shared that he had 3 children who were graduates of the Anchorage School District and opined that school choice was code for public funding of private schools. The association feared that the change to the constitution would change education to a private commodity rather than a public endeavor and could reverse Alaska's longstanding development of learning and civic virtue through public schools that were staffed with professional teachers with children from all backgrounds.

TED ANGSTADT, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), voiced opposition to the resolution and spoke as a teacher, parent, and NEA member. He discussed his family and relayed that he was a retired military member. He stated that he worked as a teacher in a high-needs Title I school. He discussed the makeup of the schools related to Title I, many students with disabilities, and low parent involvement. He believed the resolution was a threat to residents' liberty. He hoped that Alaskans could do better than the resolution and help children that needed it.

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WANDA GREENE-LAWS, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE-ANCHORAGE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the resolution. She added that there were some people who supported the argument that children should have the option of attending schools that were not struggling. She opined that when most of the options were no better or worse than what was currently offered and scarce public-school funds were used for funding the schools, it left the children in the public-school sector with fewer resources. She opined that the resolution would impede learning and school

improvements. She discussed Brown versus the Board of Education and offered that future segregation would be based on class rather than race.

ALISON ARIANS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), voiced opposition to the resolution and spoke from the perspective of a small business owner and parent. She offered that there were already plenty of choices in Alaska and thought that vouchers would take away from public schools that were already struggling. She stated that public schools were available to everyone and urged the committee to support them rather than pulling resources away from them.

VALERIE WALDROP, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), She voiced opposition to the resolution and spoke from the perspective as a parent. She talked about Hawaii and relayed that the schools were awful there. She did not want furloughs to be the next step for Alaska's schools. She believed the governor's resolution was a distraction from critical work before the legislature. She opined that the resolution would lead to an enormous waste of time and money. She urged the importance of working together to help public schools thrive.

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DEENA MITCHELL, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in strong opposition to the resolution. She understood that the state's schools had made great strides and that graduation rates had been increasing. She took her hat off to everyone in the school districts and discussed diversity offered in the Anchorage School District. She shared personal information about her children's experience. She stressed that there was much choice currently available in Alaska's schools. She related that the cost of potential legislation was unknown and referenced a non-partisan study that had indicated that it could cost approximately \$100 million in public school funds if a voucher system was instituted; she compared that to the effects of the \$23 million cut to education in the current year. She supported public schools and thought that the legislation was a diversion that the state could not afford to focus on.

JOE BOYLE, PRESIDENT, MAT-SU EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, MAT-SU (via teleconference), testified against the resolution and spoke of the need to provide a quality education for every child. He talked about advocates for universal education in

the 19th century. He spoke in support of diversity in America and opined that public education was the reason for it. He supported public schools and unity, but did not support dividing and sorting America's students.

[7:21:09 PM](#)

MARSHA BURNS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in strong opposition to the resolution. She thought that diverting public funds to private educational institutions was wrong and did not support amending the constitution to allow that. She stated that private school vouchers were not the answer to educational system problems and offered that studies had not shown that vouchers improved the educational outcomes for students. She believed that providing public funds to private schools would reduce funding for public schools and would reduce services that would be offered to students. She thought that the resolution might result in fewer students graduating and asked the committee to oppose it.

LYNN HIGHLAND, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), was not affiliated with the NEA and voiced opposition to the resolution. He supported public education and opposed anything that diluted its funding. He referenced a recent study that had indicated that every new high school student that graduated would confer a net return to tax payers of nearly \$130,000 and that it was clear that support for education was in society's best interest; however, he did not believe that vouchers advanced education. He asserted that research showed that public education was as good as and sometimes better than students with vouchers attending private school. He referenced 3 studies and claimed that they demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference in achievement between students in public schools and those with voucher assistance in private schools. He admitted that rich children in private schools did better than poor children in public schools. He agreed that some private schools did a great job, but asserted that public funding of private schools did not improve student performance; furthermore, it would take money away from those things repeatedly shown to improve student performance in public schools. He opined that smaller class sizes, good teachers, and high quality preschools were all known to boost achievement. He concluded that intelligent funding of public education was what worked.

7:26:09 PM

WILLIAM MCLEOD, SUPERINTENDENT, DILLINGHAM CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, DILLINGHAM (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. He shared a philosophical perspective on education that a free public education system was a fundamental part of sustaining a democratic republic. He discussed an educated electorate being necessary and thought that mixing some of the issues in SJR 9 could lead to elitist kinds of systems. He discussed the separation of church and state and noted the estimated cost of a voucher system caused him quite a bit of concern. He wondered where \$100 million could be cut from. He pointed out that the current public system offered much choice and discussed various programs offered in his community. He shared a personal story related to Dillingham and spoke to improvements in third grade reading, writing, and math proficiency in Dillingham. He related the challenges to graduation rates in rural Alaska and related that Dillingham had raised those rates and as well as decreased its drop-out rates. He was concerned of the potential harm that could result from the resolution's proposed changes. He cautioned against creating an "Alaskan Enron" or educational meltdown.

7:31:27 PM

AMY BOLLENBACH, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. She echoed the sentiments of previous opposition testimony and believed the idea was dangerous. She spoke about fundamentalist teachings of a Wahhabi movement within the Islamic religion and offered that they taught that it was ok to kill a non-Wahhabi; she cautioned that the state could be helping support Wahhabi schools with SJR 9. She claimed that the Wahhabi movement had spent \$87 billion to enhance Wahhabi schools in the non-Muslim world, much of which was aimed at the United States. She opined that passing the resolution could result in Alaska funding Wahhabi schools.

KATIE FINN, SELF, ANCHOR POINT (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the resolution. She read from the Alaska State Constitution on Article 9, section 6 related to public purpose as follows:

No tax shall be levied, or appropriation of public money made, or public property transferred, nor shall

the public credit be used, except for a public purpose.

Ms. Finn continued to quote from the constitution and related that it stated that nothing in the above section shall prevent payment of public funds for the direct educational benefit of students as provided by law. She cited page 144 of the citizen's guide to the Alaska State Constitution and related that the issue was not new to the state; the issue had been addressed directly in 1962 and 1979. She discussed the 1979 proposition of the state-grant program that paid Alaskan residents who were attending private college the difference between their tuition and that of the University of Alaska; opponents of the proposal claimed that it benefited the private schools directly and voters had rejected the proposal. The court declared that the grants violated the direct benefit clause of Section 1 of the Alaska State Constitution because the student was acting as a conduit for the transmission of state funds to private colleges.

[7:36:09 PM](#)

ARLENE RONDA, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), voiced opposition to the resolution. She remarked that the separation of church and state was an important part of the constitution; furthermore, along with that right came the responsibility to support the right of others to be able to do the same. She asserted that there were currently many opportunities for parents to seek education in private and or religious affiliated schools and that there were a vast variety of public funding options. She related that public schools had a clear purpose to provide basic education for everyone regardless of income, ethnicity, religion, and parental or political views. She urged the committee to keep a clear separation between church and state and support the state's public schools.

WILLIAM BRUU, SELF, FAIRVIEW (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. He shared that he had gone to school in Long Island New York and related that it was considered one of the top schools in the United States. He stated that his education had taught him a lesson from the 1860s. He learned that economically advantaged individuals in the southern states gained their economic advantage by enslaving the efforts of others; the southerners had created a situation whereby education for their labor force

was a punishable offense. He offered that the legislation would take us back to the days of slavery. He recalled a personal story about serving in the Air Force and pointed out that there was a lot of discrimination. He offered that the less you educate the population, the easier it is to control. He reported that the idea of cutting funding to public education is morally wrong.

PETER SCOTT, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), supported the voucher system and was willing to entertain the concept of introducing one. He was for public education and believed that it had a place; however, it was the private schools that had helped his children the most.

[7:42:33 PM](#)

KRISTINA TORNQUIST, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the resolution. She had grown up in Finland where the public education system was considered one of the best in the world. She thought that SJR 9 represented an incredulous and dangerous proposition. She stressed that public money should go to public schools because public education was the most effective social equalizer. She stated that children from broken homes, low income families, or immigrant families faced more problems than those from middle and upper class families; these children might have to baby sit and have less support for school at home. She offered that more choice of schools would not help children from broken homes, low income families, or immigrant families. She pointed out that public schools accepted all children regardless of background. She stressed that the change would do nothing to help students and stated that religious and private schools were not held to the same standards as public schools. She did not believe a voucher system would in the help the state's rural, remote communities.

JAMES CHESBROS, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), spoke against SJR 9. He provided quotes from text books that were used in publicly funded schools in Louisiana that illustrated bigotries, racism, religious views, and outdated science that was being taught. He opined that public dollars should not be used to convey misinformation and bigotry. He concluded that public schools promoted the public good and that people were free to choose private education.

[7:48:11 PM](#)

TRACEY MARTIN, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), spoke against SJR 9. She spoke from the perspective of a teacher and a 4th generation Alaskan and stated that she was a product of the state's public schools. She related that her children had gone through the state's public schools and that her grandchildren were attending public school. She stressed that public schools offered choice currently and were doing a good job; however, the public schools needed more funding. She emphasized that public schools were inclusive while private schools were exclusive and stated that it was important to support the state's public schools. She opined that it was a fallacy that vouchers would give poor students access to private schools and related that private schools sent their unwanted students to public schools. She stressed that the legislature needed to worry about the impacts of vouchers on public schools.

ERNIE KIRBY, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke in strong opposition to the resolution. He was excited about the choices his children had in the public schools in Mat-Su. He was concerned that he had heard nothing in the discussion of SJR 9 about inflation proofing public schools in order to enable them to maintain their current outstanding programs. He did not want his children's choices in their K-12 system to erode.

EMILY FORSTNER, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. She thought the legislature was pretty set on moving the resolution forward despite the objections that had been voiced the previous spring. She opined there was a strong mistrust of public institutions in our society and spoke in support of protecting the public trust. She believed it was imperative to back and support the state's public schools.

[7:54:15 PM](#)

GRETCHEN WEHMHOFF, SELF, CHUGIAK (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution and related that the issue needed further support and planning. She spoke from the perspective of a retired school teacher. She referenced the sponsor statement and pointed to a paragraph comparing educational resources for adults to those of children; she did not believe the comparison was a fair or realistic argument. She stressed that the issue was huge for public

education and spoke to the successes of public education in Anchorage. She believed the issue should be supported by more information and study and wondered where the money for a voucher system would come from.

SEAN REILLY, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution and believed the state should be taking its time when attempting to amend the constitution. He stated that public education was a great equalizer. The legislature had flat funded the BSA in the past several years, which would not improve outcomes in education. Providing public funding for private or religious schools would seriously detract from efforts towards public education. He shared personal information about his family's educational experience and did not believe there would be many people in favor resolution.

8:00:24 PM

TIM WALTERS, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the resolution. He stated that the legislation had many problems surrounding it like management, funding, equity, and justice. He opined that the resolution would open the door to dismantling one of the basic constitutional protections of education in Alaska without first working out the details. He stressed the importance of working issues out prior to making changes to the state's constitution.

CHERYL ROMATZ, KPEA, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), She encouraged the committee to do more research on the resolution. She spoke from the perspective of a teacher. She discussed a class she taught that showed students how to work within the rules of society, as well as the value of fair competition. She related that she taught her students that taxes paid for public services, while private money paid for business. She believed the resolution would be like giving money to Fedex or UPS because someone did not like United States Postal Service.

LADAWN DRUCE, VICE PRESIDENT, NEA ALASKA, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), spoke on behalf of NEA Alaska's president and in opposition to the resolution. She opined that changes to the constitution should be handled very carefully and that no evidence had been provided to warrant opening the state's constitution. She wondered if the public was aware of the numerous choices that were already

available within the public school system. She discussed greater accountability to education and stated that no evidence existed that the resolution would provide a better education. She thought that Alaska should not gamble on an expense as large as the resolution when districts were facing budget cuts across the state.

8:06:17 PM

HENRY ANDERSON, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. He did not believe the state's constitution should be changed to fund private or religious schools. He stated that private schools could discriminate against students. He urged the committee to hold the resolution in committee.

CATHLEEN ROLPH, KPEA, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), voiced opposition to the resolution and stated that a free public education was the great equalizer. She stated that sending funds to private schools diminished funds to the public school system and that all children deserved the same education. She pointed to websites showing that the state may give \$3,000 to \$5,000 per student who used vouchers; most families did not have that kind of money to spend. She stated that some reports showed that school was a business and expressed disagreement. She discussed the lowering of test scores and the value of a child. She stated that if the resolution passed, the legislature's goal would be highly suspect.

HUGH HAYS, SELF, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), opposed the resolution. He supported public education and believed the resolution represented a direct attack on the public education system. He had been an NEA member and former teacher. He reiterated his support for students, teachers, and the public education system. He believed that Finland had the number one education system in the world and one of the major factors in contributing was the strong teachers union.

8:12:21 PM

MARGE HAYS, SELF, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. She wished that all the energy that had been used to create the resolution had been used on public schools instead. She stated that public schools needed support and resources. She discussed that class

sizes made all the difference and communicated that choice was complicated. She offered that some children lived in poverty, which made a good education difficult and talked about children with disabilities. She stated that it was a democracy and the state should keep it that way. She related that every student needed to have an opportunity to have an educational experience that provided a means to fulfil their potential.

BRIAN SCHILLING, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), testified against the resolution and discussed a personal story related to his family and daughter. He pointed to studies related to drugs and alcohol. He discussed special services from the school district; they had spent over \$50,000 on two private schools in Anchorage that had completely failed his daughter. He stated that in three years in public education his daughter was almost caught up; he believed the results were phenomenal. He stressed that private schools did not work and did not want children like his daughter. He did not want public funding going to private schools.

[8:18:38 PM](#)

DAVID NEES, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), supported that resolution and wanted the issue to be put before the voters to decide. He offered that education in the state now was not what it had been in the 1970s. He thought that the legislators should view the constitution as a living document. He spoke about the changes to the state's education system over time discussed that the state's constitution had been amended on every article, except one. He discussed amendments that had occurred to the state's constitution since 1957 and related that 12 were voted down while 38 had been approved. He stated that students needed to be provided for and believed that Alaska had the lowest constitutional amendment change rate in the U.S. He thought that the issue should be before Alaskans to decide on and offered that it was the legislature's duty to get an issue this important on the ballot.

JOELLE HALL, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), spoke in adamant opposition to SJR 9. She offered that there was an agenda by the administration to get the issue before the voters with little debate. She opined that Commissioner Hanley was either unable or unwilling to answer some good questions about the resolution such as the financial

implications and how it would affect Rural Alaska. She pointed out that the Alaska State Constitution required a 2/3 majority in order to make a change with the idea that it had been properly vetted first. She thought that there should be more information offered before the issue was brought before the voters.

8:24:20 PM

MICHAEL CHAMBERS, CHAIR, ALASKA LIBERTARIAN PARTY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in great support of SJR 9. He stated that he had fought in Vietnam for the rights of liberty and personal choice. He relayed his family's personal experience with the public and private education systems. He discussed his history as a teacher in Alaska and his issues with the public education system. He thought that public education reinforced a short attention span. He spoke to the history of the separation of church and state in the U.S. and asserted that as a state, Alaska had every right to enjoin any private institution it wanted. He stated that the public funds in the state constitution belonged to the citizens of Alaska.

SARAH DAVIES, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), related that she was neutral to SJR 9 and urged the committee to provide transparency throughout the process. She wanted the committee to put the issue before voters.

8:29:26 PM

NORA HERZOG, STUDENTS WITH A VOICE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke against SJR 9 and thought that giving vouchers to private and religious institutions would violate the foundation of the U.S. She questioned why legislators would spend money on private schools when there was not enough money for the public school system. She relayed that students had the freedom to take the classes they chose and that public education had provided her with the tools that she needed to receive. She wondered why the state would cut funds to an already suffering public education when it could provide vouchers to private and religious schools.

ANDREA LANG, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against SJR 9. She thought that a vocal and powerful minority in the legislature was attempting to influence the public to allow for a voucher system. She

offered that students did have a choice in what school they would attend and discussed different education options in the Eagle River area. She opined that the fourth year of flat funding to education was having a negative effect on the system and related that it took money to provide enough teachers to allow for sufficient student teacher contact. She spoke of the importance of smaller class sizes, but noted that students were piled into classes because of the lack of funding. She thought that Alaska needed to identify the problem in the public school system and believed that the resolution would only worsen the public schools' abilities to provide a good education. She stated that teachers and schools were being made scapegoats for problems in the education system, but that there were other prominent variables that remain unaddressed. She discussed problems with the current education system.

ROBERT MCCLORY, SELF, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9. He thought that choice already existed in the current education system in Alaska and discussed his family's experience with the public education system. He stated that the U.S. was based on freedom, but that it did not want to subsidize private and religious schools. He spoke about the separation of church and state.

[8:37:50 PM](#)

MARK ROSEBERRY, NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, BARROW (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SJR 9 and wondered how it would help the students in Rural Alaska. He wondered what would happen to local public schools if the resolution passed. He thought that the state needed to consider the impact of the resolution on Rural Alaskans.

BOBBY LASALLE, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SJR 9 and related that she was against changing the part of the state constitution that dealt with public funds for education. She discussed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. She pointed out that public schools could not discriminate against students, but that vouchers could crush rural communities by closing schools. She stated that public schools were held accountable to adequate yearly progress and wondered if schools that received vouchers would be held to the same standard.

MICHELLE THOMAS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SJR 9 and thought that taking money away from public education and giving it to private/religious schools was a mistake given the cuts and budget deficits that Alaskan education was currently facing. She stated that flat funding had already led to bigger class sizes and had stretched the number of teachers too thin. She offered that vouchers had not increased student achievement in the Lower-48 and that they took away vital resources from the public schools. She opined that vouchers took public funds out of public schools, which welcome all students and gave the money to private school that could discriminate.

[8:43:16 PM](#)

WENDY DEMERS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), expressed opposition to SJR 9. She thought that vouchers would cost the state a lot of money and did not believe that public dollars should be used for private education. She stated that public charter schools accepted all students through a lottery, but understood that private schools could continue to choose and pick students. She did not support taking money away from already struggling public schools and believed in the separation of church and state.

AARON LOJEWSKI, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in support of SJR 9. He thought that some of the opposition arguments were misplaced and noted that his understanding was that passing the resolution would simply get the issue before the voters. He was undecided on the issue, but thought that the voters should have a say.

DON GRAY, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to SJR 9. He objected to the idea to changing the constitution to spread dollars for a non-public education. He thought that the idea of the separation of church and state was important to the founding fathers. He stated that public schools provided equitable access to education in our society. He strongly encouraged the committee to defeat the resolution and continue funding for public schools.

[8:49:19 PM](#)

REBECCA BAXTER, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified against the resolution. She spoke as a Republican, conservative Christian, voter, tax payer, and NEA member. She was a strong believer in public schools and the separation of church and state. She did not understand why the state would want to increase spending when districts were looking at cutting teachers and increasing class sizes. She pointed out that schools did great things, but that every year the schools did more and more with less funding. She stressed that teachers did their job because they loved students not because of their paycheck.

TAMMY SMITH, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the resolution. She discussed her upbringing as a Catholic. She believed in the separation between church and state and did not believe that vouchers would help students. She did not think that vouchers would help most students, but that improving their neighborhood school would. She stated that public schools were the best thing and wanted to hear people say that Alaska had great schools.

[8:54:24 PM](#)

ROBERT TAYLOR, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against the resolution and spoke from the perspective of a teacher. He discussed his history of teaching in Alaska. He stated that he had been a staffer in congress and discussed the importance of preparation on an issue. He did not believe the committee had enough information about consequences of the legislation on both sides of the issue and had not been properly prepared by staffers. He stressed the importance of keeping private things private and noted that the constitution protected private schools from public intrusions. He strongly requested that the barrier not be removed because it kept a separation between the public and the private sectors.

NEVA REECE, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against the resolution. She was hoping to adopt a child in high school and was concerned that options for a solid educational foundation would be damaged by attacks on public education. She spoke to the lack of funding to public education. She hoped to maximize opportunities as an adoptive parent and asked the committee to consider the impact that vouchers would have on all children, parents, and families. She spoke about disadvantaged students.

8:59:46 PM

MARILYN PILLIFANT, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against the resolution and spoke as a parent with a child in the Anchorage school system. She opined that Alaska did not need an ill-conceived notion that vouchers would fix education, but believed that public support was a great thing happening in public schools. She was against spending the estimated \$100 million and draining resources from the state's educational system. She invited the committee members to spend one day following a child's educational life. She recognized Senator Berta Gardner for requesting a report related to additional language in the constitution. She offered that the resolution seemed innocuous, but that it was a "Trojan horse." She implored committee members to take more time studying the issue.

PATRICK LEMAY, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the resolution and stated that it should be on the ballot for Alaskans to vote on. He discussed his personal employment and role as a parent of a child in high school. He believed in competition and believed it would benefit Alaska's educational system. He stated that all parents should have a vote in the type of education their children received.

9:04:42 PM

TAMARA KRUS-ROSELIUS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution and stated that she was testifying to represent her children. She was upset that the committee was considering moving the resolution forwards. She related that public education already had funding issues and that there was an estimate that the legislation would cost the upwards of \$99.7 million; she did not like the possible expense in the context of the already struggling public schools. She stressed that her children loved their school and asserted that taking money away would dismantle public schools. She added that public schools could not discriminate against students and were held accountable.

MARK MITCHELL, ALEUTIANS EAST EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, KING COVE (via teleconference), voiced opposition to the legislation and noted that it would take \$100 million away from public schools. He discussed closures of facilities in

Rural Alaska and asserted that the legislation would desperately hurt Rural Alaskan students.

9:08:27 PM

DIXIE HOOD, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the legislation. She discussed her history in Alaska and spoke of value of public pre-k education for all students. She thought that Alaska had not been properly supporting its schools financially. She was against any amendment to the constitution that would provide public funding to private schools. She supported the United States League of Women Voters. She strongly urged the committee to not support the resolution and urged it to support SB 147. She offered that SB 147 would increase the BSA to \$6,084 and would adjust it for inflation annually. She offered that the Senate Rules Committee had failed to refer SJR 9 to the Senate Education Committee.

Vice-Chair Fairclough asked if Ms. Hood was a volunteer of the United States League of Women Voters or if she was expressing opinions. Ms. Hood replied that she was a volunteer, but that the league had provided information regarding the issue.

DENISE KOCH, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke strongly against the resolution. She discussed going to public schools and being the mother of two children in the state. She was happy with her public education experience and offered that flat funding along with the resolution seemed like an engineered failure of public schools. She thought that the resolution would contribute to further segregation with our society and concluded that it was important to preserve strong public schools.

9:13:56 PM

JANE YOKOYAMA, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution and echoed the comments of previous opposition testimony. She did not think that Alaska did not needed to change its constitution when there was no conclusive evidence that vouchers would improve the quality of learning. She spoke to the many options available in the public schools and was proud to be a part of the public education system.

MIKE COONS, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke in support of the resolution. He asserted that the SJR 9 was not about vouchers and that the U.S. was a republic and was not a democracy. He stated that all private, secular, and religious school would have to meet current standards and laws. He stated that all private schools would need to meet requirements for public schools and gave examples of numerous government aid programs over 70 years that had succeeded. He wondered why religiously neutral and competitive, level playing fields were good for college and pre-school programs, but were not for K-12 education. He thought that the legislature needed to choose the best education options versus union interests.

[9:19:11 PM](#)

GLENN BIEGEL, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), supported SJR 9 and wondered why parents were detaching, why businesses weren't happy with employees that came out of schools, why kids were disinterested in their education, and why Alaska could not compete. He asserted that the only questions was if everyone's problems in each of the above questions had the same answer and that if there was only one answer, the state only needed one system of education. If, however, there was different answer for each child and parent to the four questions, there was a duty to allow the issue to come before voters. He thought that some of previous testifiers who spoke about equitable opportunities had kids that went to good schools; however, there were many schools that were failing. He stated that parents were desperate for choices and it was legislators' duties to let the people vote on the issue.

ANNETTE BARNETT, SELF, (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution and spoke from the perspective of a rural teacher. She was worried that vouchers would take away funds and opportunities from Rural Alaska. She related that many rural areas that were not near urban centers did not have choice available like Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks. She offered that education was funded from the same pot of money and that vouchers would take away funding from education from Rural Alaska. She thought that making public schools compete with businesses would change the playing field and related that public schools were a public interest. She thought that taking the money away from public school would create problems and urged the committee to reconsider the resolution.

9:25:22 PM

TINA WEGENER, SELF, STERLING (via teleconference), spoke in full support of SJR 9 and thought that the voucher discussion was premature at this point. She spoke from the standpoint of a single mom and offered that the debate should be made public. She thought that the language in the constitution was outdated and needed to be removed. She wanted the opportunity for people to vote on the issue.

VIRGINIA RUSCH, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke strongly against the resolution or any legislation that could lead to using public funds to support private schools. She recalled that there was a ballot measure the previous year regarding making general changes to the constitution via a constitutional convention and that it had been voted down; she wondered why the issue deserved a separate vote. She believed that public schools were critical for society and served as the training grounds for future workers and citizens. She thought that the state should provide the best public schools that it could afford. She discussed budget problems and shrinking funding and was concerned about the money that the resolution could cost because it would mean less money for public schools.

9:29:31 PM

CURTIS WATKINS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke of the need for more information before a decision was made on the resolution. He thought that justification for diverting funds from public schools, measures of classroom performance, and determining that all students received a fair shake were important things to properly vet before a decision was made on the legislation. He cautioned that children with learning disabilities needed schools that would take care of them.

PATTI HIGGINS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. She wondered if a change to Alaska's constitution would violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which stated that congress shall make no law representing the establishment of religion. She stated that vouchers were a form of government in support of religion. She reported that children in private schools were not held to the same academic standards or may not be taught the same curriculum. She stated that parents did not

have the choice with private schools, but that the admissions committee did. She discussed transportation to private schools and communicated that public schools had many choices available. She stressed that strong public schools were important and urged the committee to support the state's public schools.

[9:34:17 PM](#)

GEORGE PIERCE, SELF, KASILOF (via teleconference), spoke in strong opposition to the resolution. He urged the legislature to do its job by supporting the state's people. He relayed that over 90 percent of the state's people were opposed to the resolution. He believed the resolution was ridiculous and stated that parents loved the Anchorage School District the way it was. He stated that legislators were hired to do what people wanted them to do and were hired to fund the public schools. He believed the resolution should be thrown in the trash

RICHARD ONORATO, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke against the resolution. He related that he received a good education in a private school, but had witnessed discrimination against students. He discussed a change that had occurred over time regarding education in Alaska and spoke of an issue with overloaded classrooms. He spoke of vocational training and charter schools in the public system and thought that the Anchorage School District was doing a fantastic job. He acknowledged difficulties with education in Rural Alaska and stated that it seemed like funding was continual being cut. He thought that the discussion of vouchers and the resolution seemed like political posturing. He thought that the populace was against the resolution.

[9:40:09 PM](#)

POSIE BOGGS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the resolution because she believed the state was focusing on the wrong things related to education; strong public schools should be the priority. She discussed Alaska's failure in producing literate citizens and asserted that there had been no significant improvement in reading among Alaskan students since 2003 in the national assessment. She stated that there was no proof that private school teachers would teach literacy any better than the state's public teachers; reading created opportunities. She

thought if money was to be spent on education, teachers and teacher candidates should be supported so they passed rigorous licensure examinations in reading instruction; current tests were not rigorous.

LINDA HULEN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), voiced opposition to the resolution. She was amazed at the eloquence of some of the testifiers and assumed many of them were products of the public education system. She did believe that if the resolution was passed, it would destroy public education in Alaska. She did not think that the resolution was for the good of all children in Alaska. She pointed out that funding in the state already could not keep up with inflation and that the funding was decreasing over time. She stated that the public system did not turn any students away but served everyone and offered that there were already plenty of choices in Alaska's education system.

[9:46:13 PM](#)

PATRICK MONTAGUE, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of SJR 9 and related that he was for anything that promoted a choice to parents. He believed that private education would stimulate results and noted that the nation's first schools were private.

MATT MILLER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified against SJR 9. He thought that with the Anchorage School District facing a \$23 million budget deficit, it was not the time to discuss diverting public money to private, for-profit institutions. He stated that Alaskans did pay taxes via property taxes and state revenues so that the government could provide some services; educating children was one of those services and benefitted the community. He offered that there were a lot of choices in Alaska and that the resolution was not about choice, but about who paid for that choice. He reported that he was not opposed to private schools, but was opposed to public money being taken away from public schools and given to private institutions that were not required to operate by the same standards. He opined that it was not about competition when private schools were not required to hire certified teachers, have district-approved curriculum, and were able to control their classroom size. He observed that private schools were not required to accept all students and recalled that the private school he had attended did not accept African

Americans or students of any color. He asserted that the larger issue was that private schools did not have to accept low-achieving students, students with special needs, or students with behavioral problems; this would lead to increasing the proportion of high-cost students in public schools, while at the same time reducing the funding to those schools.

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PAUL D. BERAN, SELF, JUNEAU, testified against SJR 9 and opined that a necessary pre-requisite for democracy was an educated population. He spoke from the perspective of a minister and parent. He pointed out that public schools educated everyone and did not discriminate against students regardless of color, creed, race, or affluence. He thought the resolution would neglect the less fortunate. He opined that Alaska State Constitution was recognized as one of the premier state constitutions in all 50 states and cautioned against changing it. He reported that the needs of special students were greater and urged the committee not to pass legislation that harmed those in the most need. He strongly opposed funding private or religious schools with public funds.

SJR 9 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Meyer discussed the following meeting's agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

[9:53:58 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 p.m.