

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 17, 2014

9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Fred Dyson, Chair
Senator Cathy Giessel, Vice Chair
Senator John Coghill
Senator Bill Wielechowski

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 216(STA)
"An Act adding the Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Alutiiq, Unangax, Dena'ina, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Gwich'in, Tanana, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Hän, Ahtna, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian languages as official languages of the state."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 216

SHORT TITLE: OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE STATE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KREISS-TOMKINS, MILLETT, EDGMON, NAGEAK, HERRON

01/21/14	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/14
01/21/14	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/14	(H)	CRA, STA
02/18/14	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/18/14	(H)	Moved Out of Committee
02/18/14	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
02/19/14	(H)	CRA RPT 5DP
02/19/14	(H)	DP: FOSTER, HERRON, DRUMMOND, LEDOUX, NAGEAK
03/27/14	(H)	STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/27/14	(H)	Heard & Held
03/27/14	(H)	MINUTE(STA)
04/01/14	(H)	STA RPT CS(STA) 5DP

04/01/14 (H) DP: KREISS-TOMKINS, ISAACSON, KELLER,
GATTIS, LYNN
04/01/14 (H) STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/01/14 (H) Moved CSHB 216(STA) Out of Committee
04/01/14 (H) MINUTE(STA)
04/16/14 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/16/14 (H) VERSION: CSHB 216(STA)
04/17/14 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHON KREISS-TOMKINS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 216.

RICHARD ANDERSON, representing himself
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 216.

DAVID KATZEEK, representing himself
Juneau, Alaska
Supports HB 216.
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 216.

KIM REITMEIER, President
ANCSA Regional Association
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 216.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:01:24 AM](#)

CHAIR FRED DYSON called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski, Giessel, Coghill, and Chair Dyson.

HB 216-OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE STATE

[9:01:45 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON announced the consideration of HB 216. [CSHB 216(STA), was before the committee.]

[9:02:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHON KREISS-TOMKINS, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as one of the joint prime sponsors of HB 216 sponsor, explained that the legislation symbolically recognizes Alaska Native languages as official languages of the State of Alaska. The committee substitute (CS) includes a new Section 2 that improves the bill by defining that there is no obligation or burden on the State to print materials in all languages listed in the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said that his office contacted both Legislative Legal and the Department of Law to ensure that the bill is on the legal "straight and narrow." He cited the following excerpts from a Legislative Legal memo from Hilary Martin:

In my opinion, a court would not find the addition of 20 more languages to AS 44.33.310 imposes any additional obligations on the government.

It is my opinion that HB 216 would not require schools to teach a second language in the public school system.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS observed that in light of the foregoing, some might question the need for the bill. He said the sponsors recognize there is a statewide movement to prevent the extinction of Alaska Native languages and understand that promoting the revitalization of Native languages means the world to a lot of people. He said he doesn't generally favor symbolic legislation, but if a symbolic bill can create a sense of energy, momentum, and excitement then it achieves its purpose. Thus far, HB 216 has done exactly that, he said.

[9:04:25 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL said he appreciates the sideboards and actually considered including the term "symbolic" in the statute. He said he agrees with honoring the different languages in the state, without any mandate.

[9:05:56 AM](#)

RICHARD ANDERSON, representing himself, Juneau, Alaska, said he's a UAS student who is majoring in Alaska Native studies and language. He described HB 216 as a very important bill that has brought a glow to many faces since it was introduced. It's the right thing to do to acknowledge the people who have lived here for generations. It's a matter of respect.

[9:08:32 AM](#)

DAVID KATZEEK, representing himself, Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself and testified in Tlingit with the following English translation:

Most noble, very precious, very unique children of the earth, thank you for allowing me to come speak with you this morning. The Ancient Ones long ago, spoke to us and told us how powerful language really is. Whatever language we speak, is very powerful. Our life is in the words we speak, whether they're positive or negative or whether they're neutral. What words we speak to ourselves, more than anybody else, we actually then begin to demonstrate it when we come together. Our language really is our community. Just as you men and women sit here and you speak the English language, you develop a community with one another. Whether you agree with each other or disagree, you have community.

MR. KATZEEK suggested the members review the reports after Wrangell was bombarded and what was said about the Tlingit People, their language and the ways and means in which they worked. It shows the power of the language, the respect and the honor. Most importantly, it showed they agreed to disagree. This is very powerful in any society, he said.

MR. KATZEEK related that he speaks English fluently because his parents and others in his community told him that there was nothing he couldn't learn because he was intelligent. He said that calling the committee members precious and special and unique children of the earth is a powerful way to address another human being. When Tlingit children begin to speak their language in school you can see how happy they are because they're called precious and genius in Tlingit. These are ancient words and he strongly encourages the state to look at what it took for the Indigenous People to settle the language and the kind of language that they spoke that helped to overcome floods, famine, and disease.

MR. KATZEEK thanked the committee for giving him the opportunity to testify and asked that they favorably consider the bill. It's important for the Native community.

CHAIR DYSON expressed respect for the Tlingit community and culture.

[9:16:28 AM](#)

KIM REITMEIER, President, ANCSA Regional Association, testified in support of HB 216. She said the ANCSA Regional Association represents the chief executive officers of the 12 land-based regional Alaska Native corporations. The corporations are owned by over 100,000 Alaska Native people and were formed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. The mission of the Association is to collaborate in the creation of a sustainable socio-economic future for Alaska Native people. They recognize civic engagement as an essential element to the success of the culture and communities.

She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 216 that recognizes all Alaska Native languages as official languages of the State of Alaska. This is an important step in recognizing the vital role of Alaska Native people and their culture. She thanked the committee for its consideration.

CHAIR DYSON noted that in a previous session he introduced a bill to include in parenthesis the Native names for geographical features on state maps. He encouraged Ms. Reitmeier and Mr. Katzeek to support the bill when it comes up again.

MR. KETZEEK expressed his appreciation.

[9:22:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON recessed the Senate State Affairs Committee to a call of the chair.

[The committee did not reconvene on 4/17/14 and SB 216 was held in committee.]