

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 18, 2014

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Donald Olson

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."

- MOVED CSHB 216(STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 356(STA)

"An Act establishing the Advisory Committee on Wellness; and relating to the administration of state group health insurance policies."

- HEARD & 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) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 04/17/14 (S) STA
 04/17/14 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
 04/17/14 (S) <Pending Referral>
 04/18/14 (S) STA AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: HB 356

SHORT TITLE: ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WELLNESS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) SEATON

02/26/14 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 02/26/14 (H) HSS, STA
 03/20/14 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
 03/20/14 (H) Heard & Held
 03/20/14 (H) MINUTE(HSS)
 04/10/14 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
 04/10/14 (H) Moved Out of Committee
 04/10/14 (H) MINUTE(HSS)
 04/11/14 (H) HSS RPT 2DP 3NR
 04/11/14 (H) DP: SEATON, NAGEAK
 04/11/14 (H) NR: PRUITT, KELLER, HIGGINS
 04/15/14 (H) STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
 04/15/14 (H) Moved CSHB 356(STA) Out of Committee
 04/15/14 (H) MINUTE(STA)
 04/16/14 (H) STA RPT CS(STA) 2DP 1NR 1AM
 04/16/14 (H) DP: ISAACSON, LYNN
 04/16/14 (H) NR: KELLER
 04/16/14 (H) AM: GATTIS

04/17/14 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/17/14 (H) VERSION: CSHB 356(STA)
04/17/14 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/17/14 (S) STA
04/18/14 (S) STA AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

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

REPRESENTATIVE PAUL SEATON
Alaska State Legislature
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 356

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:11 AM](#)

CHAIR FRED DYSON called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski, Coghill, Giessel, and Chair Dyson.

HB 216-OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE STATE

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

[8:03:37 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL moved Amendment 1.

CHAIR DYSON objected for discussion purposes.

SENATOR COGHILL explained that the amendment places the bill under a different statute and terms the languages listed in the bill as "ceremonial" as opposed to "official."

[8:06:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHON KREISS-TOMKINS, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of HB 216, reviewed Senator Coghill's amendment and asked if the intent is to move the language from Chapter 44.12 to Chapter 44.09.

SENATOR COGHILL answered yes; the amendment would create a new Sec. 44.09.150.

CHAIR DYSON offered to set the bill aside to give the sponsor an opportunity to review the amendment.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS explained that the bill amends Chapter 44.12 because that chapter addresses official language. He said he appreciates the intent of creating a new section in Chapter 44.09, but has a slight hesitation. He advised that the balance he hopes to strike is to impose no obligation or burden on government, but not make it appear that these languages are in a display case and ceremonial.

SENATOR COGHILL said his intention is to honor the languages while recognizing that Alaska trades in English.

[8:11:07 AM](#)

At ease.

[8:12:24 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON reconvened the meeting and recessed to a call of the chair.

HB 356-ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WELLNESS

[11:18:28 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of HB 356. [CSHB 356(STA) was before the committee.]

[11:18:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PAUL SEATON, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of HB 356, introduced the bill paraphrasing the following sponsor statement:

HB 356 requires the Commissioner of the Department of Administration to implement procedures for decreasing the incidence of disease in Alaska in order to hold the inflation of healthcare costs of active and retired Alaska state employees to 2% per year.

According to the Institute of Social and Economic Research, total health care spending in Alaska topped \$7.5 billion in Alaska in 2010, with state government employers paying over \$400 million. A major component of our \$12 billion unfunded pension liability is retiree healthcare costs. HB 356 requires the Commissioner of Administration to put in place

programs that will decrease the incidence of disease in State of Alaska employees, both current and retired, in order to hold the inflation of costs to 2% per year.

This bill focuses on preventing the incidence of disease as opposed to treatment of disease. Prevention of disease is the policy approach unanimously requested of the Governor by the legislature through HCR 5 in 2011. This is an area of healthcare where the most economic impact can be achieved. For instance, recent studies show that an action as simple as taking a daily supplement of 5,000 IU of vitamin D can dramatically reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, autism, gingivitis, and many other conditions.

HB 354 creates an Advisory Committee on Wellness which is charged with making recommendations to the Commissioner of Administration on ways to decrease the incidence of disease in Alaska. HB 365 will enforce a paradigm shift for the Department of Administration and the Department of Health and Social Services. It will require the agencies to implement policies to keep Alaska state employees healthy by preventing disease, rather than the common, reactive policy of waiting until people get sick and then treating them.

[11:21:23 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked how this advisory committee differs from the Alaska Health Care Commission (AHCC), which is already established.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON replied AHCC deals broadly with all Alaskans, whereas the proposed Advisory Committee on Wellness, working within the Department of Administration, would focus on active and retired State of Alaska employees and their dependents to encourage participation in wellness measures.

SENATOR GIESSEL questioned what would change with passage of the bill, because she already sees that happening.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON explained that the existing wellness committee meets infrequently and the Department of Administration feels this would ensure that any recommendations are taken seriously. Although AHCC has done some things like negotiate for lower gym memberships, it has limited ability and

direction to talk about such things as co-pays if DOA determines it would be beneficial to the state in reducing health care costs.

[11:23:43 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON asked if he was saying that DOA can't negotiate co-pays without the proposed volunteer committee.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON clarified that there is no statutory direction for DOA to do that, but it has the authority.

CHAIR DYSON commented that there is nothing to keep any group of experts from forwarding suggestions and recommendations on to DOA regarding employee health issues.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON replied that is correct, but there isn't a formal process. He reported that there was great interest in the advisory group last year, but the departments weren't required to respond to their recommendations and the group fell apart.

[11:25:05 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON questioned whether it couldn't be resurrected and operate under existing statute.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said there's nothing that prevents it, but there's nothing in statute that specifies that there's anything to be done.

[11:25:39 AM](#)

CHAIR DYSON held HB 354 in committee.

HB 216-OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE STATE

CHAIR DYSON returned attention to HB 216. [Amendment 1 was under consideration.]

[11:26:10 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL restated that the intent of Amendment 1 is to place the bill in Chapter 44.09 that houses the state seal, flag, and emblems. He noted that he and the sponsor were working on a compromise.

[11:28:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHON KREISS-TOMKINS, sponsor of HB 216, said he wants to ensure that the language is still true to the spirit of the bill while acknowledging Senator Coghill's concern. It is very clear in statute that English is the official language of

government and commerce in Alaska. The bill was never intended to touch that; its purpose is to bring these Native languages in on an equal plane, because they are just as Alaskan as English. He said he didn't object to moving the bill to Chapter 44.09 as long as the wording in the bill still gives these Native languages official status. He expressed hesitation about using the term "ceremonial."

CHAIR DYSON disagreed with using the term "ceremonial" and suggested using the term "recognized;" it is neither official nor ceremonial.

[11:31:37 AM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he appreciates the effort to find a compromise, but his perspective is that the bill does not impact the voter passed initiative that enacted AS 44.12.320. It reads as follows:

SCOPE

The English language is the language to be used by all public agencies in all government functions and actions. The English language shall be used in the preparation of all official public documents and records, including all documents officially compiled, published or recorded by the government.

He noted that Senator Coghill provided a Legislative Legal memorandum that in part says:

In my opinion, HB 216 would not create an additional duty of government to provide documents in another language.

I do not believe that HB 216 would require printing ballots and voting materials in the official languages. It is my opinion that HB 216 would not place any additional burdens on schools. It is my opinion that HB 216 would not require schools to teach a second language in the public school system.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he understands Senator Coghill's concern, but he believes the problems have been addressed and the bill doesn't need change.

SENATOR GIESSEL noted that Sec. 44.12.310 says that the English language is the official language of the State of Alaska.

SENATOR COGHILL agreed, adding that the bill would change that so that English and the listed Native languages would be the official languages of the state. He thought that would be confusing, based on the findings and scope. He worried that this could cause problems.

[11:36:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS questioned whether moving the text of the bill to Chapter 44.09 would be a fair compromise.

SENATOR COGHILL agreed with the suggestion.

CHAIR DYSON suggested the committee move the bill and amend it on the floor.

SENATOR COGHILL offered to withdraw the amendment and work with the sponsor on a floor amendment.

[11:38:30 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL withdrew Amendment 1.

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report CS for HB 216(STA), labeled 28-LS0905\Y, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

CHAIR DYSON found no objection and announced that CSHB 216(STA) is reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

[11:39:13 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dyson adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee hearing at 11:39 a.m.