

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
March 25, 2015
2:04 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair MacKinnon called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 2:04 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Anna MacKinnon, Co-Chair
Senator Pete Kelly, Co-Chair
Senator Peter Micciche, Vice-Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Mike Dunleavy
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Tim Lamkin, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens; Senator Gary Stevens, Sponsor.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Michael Poliakoff, Vice-president of Policy American Council of Trustees and Alumni, Virginia; Samuel Stone, Executive Director, Civics Education Initiative, Arizona; Stuart Thompson, Self, Mat-Su.

SUMMARY

SCR 1 CIVICS EDUCATION TASK FORCE

SCR 1 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 57 CLEAN AIR ACT PLAN

SB 57 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

#scr1

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1

Relating to a legislative task force on civics education.

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TIM LAMKIN, STAFF, SENATOR GARY STEVENS, explained the resolution had grown out of the quiet epidemic amongst students in the nation, prompted by No Child Left Behind, of academic testing overriding civics education. He said that liberal arts had been left behind in public education, which had been recognized by other states, resulting in policies to change curriculum in order to highlight civics. He noted that in 2000, the legislature passed House Bill 192, which required school districts to regularly recite the Pledge of Allegiance. He shared that in order to gain citizenship incoming citizens had to pass a civics test by 60 percent. He opined that 92 percent of immigrants were passing the test by 60 percent, compared to 3 to 4 percent of graduating high school seniors in Arizona and Oklahoma in 2012. He concluded that America's youth was disassociated from the republic.

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SENATOR GARY STEVENS, SPONSOR, echoed Mr. Lamkin's comments. He believed that the task force would lead to enforceable solutions. He felt that Alaska could learn from other states. He stated that the City of Boston had brought industry and educators together to figure out how to teach civics in each classroom and incorporate civics throughout the curriculum.

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Senator Dunleavy thought that the issue was worth exploring. He opined that the percentage of eligible voters in the country was in decline. He said that 22 countries in the world mandated voting. He thought that the fact that American citizens had the right to choose not to vote was problematic. He hoped a task force could make a difference in the present state of civics education in the country.

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Co-Chair MacKinnon wondered who would participate in the task force. Senator Stevens deferred to Mr. Lamkin.

Mr. Lamkin spoke to Page 2, line 22 of the bill:

FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force consists of 12 members as follows:

(1) three members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, including one member of the minority organizational caucus;

(2) three members of the senate appointed by the president of the senate, including one member of the minority organizational caucus;

(3) the commissioner of education and early development or the commissioner's designee;

(4) five members of the public appointed jointly by the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate as follows:

(A) one member of the National Education Association who is a teacher with significant teaching experience in civics or social studies education;

(B) one member representing the Association of Alaska School Boards;

(C) one member who is a student enrolled in good standing in a public high school who will be a senior in the school on the date of the first meeting of the task force; the student must demonstrate an interest in civics education and leadership;

(D) one member who is a judge or otherwise represents the judicial branch of state government;

(E) one member representing the University of Alaska;

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MICHAEL POLIAKOFF, VICE-PRESIDENT OF POLICY AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI, VIRGINIA (via teleconference), discussed the presentation, "Students, Citizens and Our Nation's Future" (copy on file).

Mr. Poliakoff looked at Slide 2, "James Madison 1822":

Learned Institutions ought to be favorite objects with every free people. They throw that light over the public mind which is the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty. ...

What spectacle can be more edifying or more seasonable, than that of Liberty & Learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual & surest support?

Mr. Poliakoff stated that civic education had to be based on civil knowledge and understanding of America's institutions of government. He noted that SCR 1 properly began with a call to assess the state of civic education in Alaska. He suggested that no student should leave high school without a strong foundation in United States History; including how the institutions of government developed. He asserted that no student should leave college without a mature collegiate grasp of American History, and the successes and failures of its free institutions. He relayed that the country's founders were aware that the lifespan of liberty was unlikely to be long without well informed, participating, citizens.

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Mr. Poliakoff highlighted Slide 3, "National Perspectives on Historical Illiteracy":

Survey of 556 college seniors at the "Top 25" National Universities and the "Top 25" National Liberal Arts Colleges.

- Beavis and Butthead 99 percent identified correctly
- Snoop Doggy Dog 98 percent identified correctly
- George Washington as general at Yorktown 34 percent identified correctly
- James Madison as Father of the Constitution 23 percent identified correctly
- Abraham Lincoln as author of the words:

"Government of the people, by the people, for the people" 22 percent identified correctly

Mr. Poliakoff opined that nationwide, free institutions were threatened by a plague of ignorance and under education in civic matters. He shared that the American Council surveyed college students and college graduates regularly to assess the state of historical and civic knowledge, with terrifying results.

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Mr. Poliakoff discussed Slide 4, "It Gets Worse":

Results of a 2012 survey of recent college graduates
(G f K Custom Research North America)

How Long Are Terms for Members of Congress?

38.4 percent identified correctly

Who is Lady Gaga?

96.2 percent identified correctly

Mr. Poliakoff asserted that voters that could not name the term lengths of the representatives they elected were unlikely to be making well informed decisions. He relayed that a 2006 Pew Research Report revealed that 26 percent of 18 to 29 year-olds polled could name Condoleezza Rice as the Secretary of State; only 15 percent knew that Vladimir Putin was president of Russia.

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Mr. Poliakoff looked at Slide 5, "Cause and Effect":

ACTA'S Study of the Core Curriculum:
What Will They Learn?

82 percent of four-year colleges and universities do not require foundational study of American history or government

He noted that the proposed legislation looked toward best practices in other states. He said that Texas, Georgia and Nevada had legislation for public universities that required all students to take coarse work within their core curriculum requirements in United States History and Government. He shared that Arizona and North Dakota had

recently passed laws mandating that students pass examinations showing civic literacy. He said that Alaska did very well to consider the practices of states that required coarse work based on knowledge and understanding of the primary documents of American and state government. He asserted that the initiatives in other states had not been expensive. He felt that community service projects were part of an important ethic, characteristic of the U.S., and were a key part of religious and civic associations. He contended that schools and colleges were the unique and essential place for teaching and learning about America's history and government. He hoped that the initiative would lead to new requirements in the state at the K-12 and collegiate levels.

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Senator Dunleavy understood that there were many ways in which historical documents could be interpreted. He wondered which interpretation would be taught in schools and colleges.

Mr. Poliakoff replied that it would be the best practice to bring case studies and real life examples of how the system of government in the U.S. worked. He said that teachers should be honest to teach of times when the system has failed. He felt that core knowledge of documents was the basis for all discussion and that there was no substitute for the civic empowerment that came from knowing the laws and institutions of government in the nation, and how they came to be.

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SAMUEL STONE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CIVICS EDUCATION INITIATIVE, ARIZONA (via teleconference), testified in support of the resolution. He shared that there were many studies that reflected the importance of the legislation. He asserted that the United States Civics and Immigration Service (USCIS) exam was very basic. He felt that American students were lacking in civics education. He thought that stronger civics education in schools could create future civic leaders. He hoped that the task force could explore options as to how schools could improve civics programs and engage students. He noted that the founding fathers had debated whether the United States Constitution should be a

living or static document, which had led to the great growth of our society.

Co-Chair MacKinnon OPENED public testimony.

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STUART THOMPSON, SELF, MAT-SU (via teleconference), read from a prepared testimony (copy on file):

I salute the chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Stuart Thompson—an Alaska citizen living in Senator Huggins district—acting on behalf of myself and posterity in support of Senator Stevens SCR 1. I have carefully prepared 3 minute testimony that succinctly supplements what I've already communicated. Start of my testimony.

My previous testimony on record covered clear justification for launching a legislative task force on civics education, and suggested amendments that would strengthen results from that task force. Some of these amendments apparently have already found favor with Senator Stevens. I am happy to contribute.

There are two matters I shall cover today. One is why I apparently come across as a mad-dog before you. The other is arming you against intimidation from Alaska's apparent fiscal troubles in the pursuit of your duties under Article 7 of the Alaska Constitution.

First why do I seem to come across as a mad-dog? There are two well-evidenced principles about all government that clarify matters. To save time, consider the simplest one

Currently, citizens are expected to just voice their concerns and mere opinions about bills—easily accomplished in three minutes. So who am I to try to take time to testify on relevant facts, law, history, and bill improvements as if I was one of those so-called experts—who are allowed an hour or more for "presentations"? I testify the way I do because history teaches that multiple minds—organized even incrementally—do a better job of piecing together solutions than even a couple geniuses given the same task.. If it wasn't for this, democracies and

republics like ours wouldn't ever have reason to come into existence! We'd all be living under Plato's philosopher kings, as advised by councils of investigators.

Second, if you think favorably of Senator Steven's SCR1, but are discouraged because of Alaska's fiscal troubles, take heart. I have five stand-alone solutions for financing SCR1's task force and even its eventual recommendations—all arising from our political heritage. None depend on "stealing from Peter to pay Paul". Naturally, I don't have sufficient time to elaborate here and now, and finance is not under this committee's jurisdiction. But since past Legislatures have been weak in their fiduciary duties—thereby creating Alaska's current fiscal troubles—you senators should jointly urge Finance to show some humility and consider some outside-of-the box thinking.

So all I ask of this committee—beyond passing this bill out—is for its members to contrive making the Finance Committee give me 9 minutes to present my ideas for financing SCR1 and its inevitable task force recommendations. Senator Dunleavy, you might remind fellow Finance Committee members that the time-honored maxim for handling fiscal problems is creating additional .income streams while concurrently cutting expenditures. And ask how they can deny my 9 minutes on that basis. Consequently if they balk or get egotistical, Senator Huggins can legitimately execute a maneuver as Rules Committee Chairman. He can threaten to bring this bill and my fiscal testimony to a Committee of the Whole—due to Finance Committee negligence.

As usual, I am faxing this testimony to the Committee, and as a courtesy I'll fax the prepared testimony I want to give to the Finance Committee as well. It doesn't matter which of my solutions to financing SCR1 gets utilized — they all achieve the same result. But what is criminal—I repeat criminal—is rejecting any and all solutions to a problem that I have drastically proven is inherently solvable. Good luck on your deliberations.

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Co-Chair MacKinnon CLOSED public testimony.

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Senator Stevens noted that there was more to a civics education than the foundational documents of the country; the documents were crucial, but there were additional classes in history, democracy, government, parliamentary procedure, democratic processes and current events that were important. He quoted Benjamin Franklin in response to the question whether America was a republic or a monarchy:

"A republic, if you can keep it."

SCR 1 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair MacKinnon discussed housekeeping.

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ADJOURNMENT

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The meeting was adjourned at 2:37 p.m.