

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 6, 2018

8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Justin Parish, Co-Chair
Representative Harriet Drummond
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative David Talerico
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (alternate)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative John Lincoln
Representative DeLena Johnson (alternate)

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 19
Urging Governor Bill Walker to issue an administrative order recognizing a linguistic emergency.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HCR 19

SHORT TITLE: GOVERNOR: AK NATIVE LANGUAGES EMERGENCY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) ORTIZ

02/16/18	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/16/18	(H)	CRA
03/06/18	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE DAN ORTIZ
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HCR 19.

ALBERT NINGEULOOK

Shishmaref, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

YAAYUK BERNADETTE ALVANNA-STIMPFLE, Director

Eskimo Heritage Program

Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC)

Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified to urge Governor Bill Walker to issue an administrative order in response to a linguistic crisis.

ANNETTE EVANS SMITH, Chair

Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

XH'UNEI LANCE TWITCHELL, Vice-Chair

Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC);

Assistant Professor of Alaska Native Languages

University of Alaska Southeast

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

MARTIN STEPETIN

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

LIZ MEDICINE CROW

First Alaskans Institute

Kake, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

NANCY BARNES, Member

Juneau Sm'algyax Group

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

DON BREMNER

Yakutat, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HCR 19.

DELLA CHENEY

Take, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HCR 19.

ALISON MARKS

(No address provided)

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HCR 19.

SARAH DYBDAHL, Manager

Cultural Heritage and Education

Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 19.

STUART McDONALD, Superintendent

North Slope Borough School District

Utqiagvik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HCR 19.

JODIE GATTI, Staff

Representative Dan Ortiz

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered a question during the hearing on HCR 19, on behalf of Representative Ortiz, prime sponsor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JUSTIN PARISH called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Talerico, Drummond, Saddler, and Parish were present at the call to order. Representatives Rauscher and Kreiss-Tomkins (alternate) arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HCR 19-GOVERNOR: AK NATIVE LANGUAGES EMERGENCY

[8:05:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 19, Urging Governor Bill Walker to issue an administrative order recognizing a linguistic emergency.

[8:05:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAN ORTIZ, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HJR 19. He read the sponsor statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The state has moved in the right direction by acknowledging and recognizing the 20 Alaska Native languages as official languages of the state; however, recognition is just the first step. The intent of this resolution is to heed the suggestions put forth by the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (ANLPAC).

The Council strongly urges that the Governor issue an Administrative Order, recognizing the linguistic emergency that exists, and state that it is the policy of the State of Alaska to actively promote the survival and continued use of all of Alaska's 20 Native languages.

In their 2018 Biennial Report to the Governor and Legislature, ANLPAC warned that all 20 Alaska Native languages are in crisis, and most are predicted to become extinct or dormant by the end of the 21st century. The State of Alaska can no longer sustain these rates of language loss unless policy changes are enacted that support people who are learning and speaking Alaska Native languages throughout the state.

The loss of language represents the loss of a critical piece of our history, culture, and a traditional way

of life. I respectfully request the Legislature join me in support of ANLPAC and the languages that represent intergenerational knowledge.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ reported that the last speaker of the Eyak language died in 2008. The last fluent speaker of the Tanana language is now 93 years of age. He said this illustrates what a critical point the state is in, in terms of its Native languages. He said Alaska culture began over 10,000 years ago with its Native people. He stated that it is critical to preserve the language for future generations.

8:10:05 AM

ALBERT NINGEULOOK testified that Inupiaq is his first language. He expressed that he is representing elders who still live and those who have passed. He urged the committee to ask Governor Bill Walker to issue an administrative order to save Alaska's Native dialects. He recited a Bible verse as follows: "Do not let their hearts be troubled; believe in God; believe also in me." He then offered the words in Inupiaq. He urged the legislature to support HCR 19.

8:14:11 AM

YAAYUK BERNADETTE ALVANNA-STIMPFLE, Director, Eskimo Heritage Program, Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC), testified that her family originates from King Island and she lives in Nome, Alaska, and has been affiliated with ANLPAC since 2012. She urged Governor Walker to issue an administrative order in response to a linguistic crisis. To explain the impact of language loss over the last 50 years, she said Native people in Alaska were "forced to forget their identity as ... Native language speakers." She said there are many elders in her region that did not speak their language to their children, and childhood is a critical time for people to learn a language. Children were sent to boarding schools. She said, "Religion and education played a huge role in this Native language loss." Young people did not understand why they were disconnected from their elders. Native dance and cultural

values were not learned, she said, and healing from the past traumas and language loss needs to happen.

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLE asked anyone in the room who spoke an Alaska Native language fluently to stand up. [A few people stood.] She then asked anyone in the room who understood or spoke some Native language to stand. [Considerably more of the audience stood.] Finally, she asked those who neither spoke nor understood any of the Native languages to stand. [All committee members stood.] She stated, "We are very sorry for not speaking with you, and we didn't speak to you in our identity and language. We wanted you to do well in school and at jobs when you grow up. We now know that was not right."

[8:17:37 AM](#)

ANNETTE EVANS SMITH, Chair, Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC), testified in support of HCR 19. She said she also works at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. She said it is important in understanding the status of Alaska Native languages to understand the historical context that resulted in [the loss of Native language speakers]. She directed attention to an Indigenous People's Language Map [hard copy included in the committee packet], which shows color-coded regions where various Native languages are originated.

MS. EVANS SMITH presented the history that erased culture from the map and tore pieces of the map off, one by one, to signify this loss as she shared the history, as follows:

Beginning in 1867, with the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia, without consulting the Unangan people, Russia signs a treaty with the United States. American administration begins on October 18th. The inhabitants are to be citizens. The uncivilized tribes will be subject to the laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt. No Alaska Natives are granted citizenship.

Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary, convenes a meeting of protestant mission society representatives

in Pennsylvania to encourage and coordinate the establishment of mission stations around Alaska.

Congress passes an Organic Act to provide civil government in Alaska. The Act calls for the establishment of schools for Native and non-Native children. The secretary of Interior appoints Sheldon Jackson as general agent for education for Alaska - a position Jackson holds until 1906.

Native languages are disallowed from public schools - 1886.

The U.S. Bureau of Education ends its practice of contracting with missionary groups in Alaska to operate day schools and opens federal day schools. A new number of new school buildings are constructed in Native villages. These federal schools continue on until about 1966.

Congress passes the Nelson Act that among other things funds roads, education, and care for the mentally ill in Alaska. The administration states the funds for education are for schools for white children and those of mixed ... blood who need a civilized life. This results in a second school system. Alaska has the U.S. Bureau of Education - later the BIA - schools, created by the Organic Act of 1884, that became known as Native schools, and territory - later state - schools. This dual system operates until the 1980s.

1908: Three Native families in Sitka go to court seeking permission for their children to go to school in the territorial town. The judge determines - in the case known as David v. Sitka School Board the families do not lead a civilized life, and hence, does not permit the children to enroll in the territorial school.

1912: 13 Southeast Alaska Natives created the Alaska Native Brotherhood and ... the Alaska Native

Sisterhood. So, you can see the map can go back together.

1915: The territorial legislature passes a law, Chapter 24, Session Laws of Alaska, 1915, recognizing Native people as citizens, though the law requires a Native person to get endorsements from five white citizens. The law requires a Native person to get endorsements from five white citizens and to have severed all tribal relationships and to have adapted the habits of a civilized life. We have copies if you would like to see an example of one.

1918: The pandemic flu ... spreads to Alaska and rages through 1919. Many Native children, particularly in the Seward Peninsula and in the Interior, are orphaned. In my family ... of nine, three sisters survive.

The territorial legislature passes a Literacy Act that requires a person to read and write English to vote in territorial elections. And then, of course, we pass the Anti-Discrimination Law, and you can see again we can build our map back. And then in 1972, the legislature passes ... and creates the Alaska Native Language Center.

In 1990 Congress passes the Native American Languages Act, federally recognizing tribes for the first time and ... languages. Though at first unfunded, it federally recognizes languages. In 2012, the Alaska State Legislature created Senate Bill 130, known as ANLPAC or the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council. And then, of course, the recognition that officially recognizes the languages of Alaska as official languages of the state. And Alaska, I believe, is still one of only two states in the Nation that has done so.

So, you can see pieces of the map can go back together, with well-planned, well-implemented state

policy. When we all work together, we can rebuild our map. There are many pieces that still need to be put back, but with all of us working together, we can do this.

MS. EVANS SMITH said ANLPAC made recommendations to the legislature on January 1, 2018. She said community members are partners in ANLPAC's network. She said in the final pages of the plan there is a list of all of the immersion programs and all individuals leading these programs, largely without state support. She asked the committee to imagine what those people could do with state support. She said Native children do better, perform better in school, and make better life choices [when they are not conflicted about their culture and identity]. She said ANLPAC has been gathering testimony "from members across the state of Alaska," and the genesis of the recommendation under HCR 19 came from a member of the public.

[8:30:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked Ms. Evans Smith what she envisions state support would look like.

MS. EVANS SMITH answered state policy regarding emersion, for which there currently is not a lot of support. She mentioned the state certificate program, and she offered her understanding that a bill is currently being heard by the legislature that would further strengthen the certificate program for teachers. She mentioned place names. She further mentioned "a truth and reconciliation process for the state of Alaska." She emphasized the need for a healing process much like that which Canada is experiencing now. Ms. Evans Smith said there is a need for research to determine "exactly where our speakers are," "how many new speakers are being created," and how old the current speakers are. She expounded on the idea of place names by stating, "Alaska needs to be special, but it needs to be everywhere; it needs to be visible." She indicated that ANLPAC would like to see [Alaska Native languages] as part of the education curriculum.

[8:33:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked Ms. Evans Smith to expound on her final comment.

MS. SMITH reflected that German, French, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese are taught in the Anchorage School District, and other districts in Alaska, and [ANLPAC] would like Native languages offered with the same support.

[8:34:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked for confirmation that there currently is no elective for Alaska Native languages in public schools in Alaska.

MS. SMITH [answered no].

[8:34:39 AM](#)

XH'UNEI LANCE TWITCHELL, Vice-Chair, Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC); Assistant Professor of Alaska Native Languages, University of Alaska Southeast, noted that he is a doctoral candidate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Cultural & Language Revitalization at the Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, College of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. He began his testimony in his language; it read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

X'unei áyá aḡ saayí. Good morning, honorable Representatives of the State of Alaska. My name is X'unei Lance Twitchell. I am an Assistant Professor of Alaska Native Languages at the University of Alaska Southeast, a doctoral candidate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Cultural & Language Revitalization at the, and a council member of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. I will begin my testimony in my language, and will translate.

xwasikóo yadáli át áwé wáa sá at woonei haa aaní káa. tlaḡ wáa sá haa kát uwagút. yá yak'éiyí át yá Lingít'aaní káa ḡowdziteeyí át-haa yoo x'atángi-

tleidahéen, hél has du tuwáa ushgú. has akaawa.aaḵw áwé, x'éigaa, ldakát wé aan yátx'i yoo x'atánkx'i yax has ayawsi.eení. eeshandéin yoo haa kaawashóo wé gaaw. eeshandéin yoo haa kasheix yeisú. wáanáx sáwé hél haa eedé wudushee? ch'u uwayáa tléináx haa yatee wé naná tin

hél yéi kgwatee. a shóot wutuwa.át, yeewháan. yá ax dachxánx'i yán, hél has aguxsakoo wuliteesh haa yoo x'atángi daat. yá haa aaní daax gugwa.aadi, has asaga.aax. gwál ax'eixwaa.aax. yéi áwé axwalxéis' yá yagye.

MR. TWITCHELL translated as follows:

It is a heavy thing, what happened on our ancestral land. It really came upon us. This wonderful thing that was born on our land – our [Tlingit] language – at one time they did not want it. They tried, truly, to kill all the languages that belonged to the children of the lands of Alaska. How horribly we suffered at that time. How horribly we suffer today. Why was a hand not extended to us? It is as if we are alone with this great death.

It will no longer be this way. We have reached the end of it. My grandchildren, they are not going to know lonesomeness for our language. Those who walk upon our land, let them hear it. Maybe they will understand. That is my wish today.

[8:37:40 AM](#)

MR. TWITCHELL continued his testimony, as follows:

My fellow council members shared tremendous information with you, and my goal is to hone our focus in on two things: the ways the horrors of yesterday affect us all and the effectiveness of public policy.

It is hard for us to hear, and I assure you the reason I share it is not to make anyone feel guilty, but this testimony must include the suffering of our elders and ancestors. This is a real thing and must not be transformed into a metaphor or minimized into tough choices or the ways that things had to be. These are life stories shared with me by three amazing elders – Nora Dauenhauer, Marge Dutson, and Ida Calmegane – and I give them my respect and honor today.

There is a little school across from us near a place called Anax Yaa Andagan Yé, which translates as “Where the Sun Rays First Hit,” and it is sometimes called Douglas Boat Harbor. This little school houses a Montessori program. Good things happen there. Good people are there. But we know it is a place that once housed great suffering and injustice.

One of our elders who went to school there in the 1930s shared a story about having kerosene dumped on her head the first day of school because the teachers said they were dirty. Another talked about being lifted up by her hair and shaken, as a delicate five-year-old child, lifted by her hair and shaken violently because she spoke the language of the people of this great land.

A teacher who wrote a book in 1904 about his experiences said, “We required them to speak nothing but English except by permission, but they often would get into the washroom or in the wood shed, and having set a watch, they would indulge in a good Indian talk. A few cases of this kind, and we applied a heroic remedy to stop it. We obtained a bottle of myrrh and capsicum: myrrh is bitter as gall and capsicum hot like fire. We prepared a little sponge; saturated it with this solution; and everyone that talked Indian had his mouth washed to take away the taint of the Indian language!”

An elder who has worked with me for a long time was hearing some of these stories, as I was researching language shift and attempted genocide in the United States. She shared this with me: "I was never beat like that, but I had a teacher who used to call me over every time she saw me. She would tell me when I was a little girl, every day: 'You people think you're going to be as good as us, but you're not. You're just a second-class citizen, and no matter how long you try, you will never be as good as us.'"

We are a battered people. Alaska Native peoples are resilient and have survived tremendous hardships. We remain. We are still here, and we are telling you that it is time for massive change. The social debt is due, and it is time to shift the scales to one of more balance. The actions of the past affect us today by creating tremendous loss and suffering on all sides and by entrenching us in a great lie that allows us to believe that languages can be ranked in terms of use, effectiveness, and need – often before we have ever learned anything about them.

This is a health issue. The damage is physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, and social. If language loss were a cancer, then we would be scrambling to do something. If our languages were panda bears, there would be protests and news stories around the world. I think what we have done in the past few years are positive steps, but we have really only said that we are going to do something, and we have not initiated enough changes in enough places to secure a strong future for our languages.

Public policy can correct some of the horrific wrongs that occurred throughout Alaska. Federal employees, state employees, and religious leaders had their hands in the attempted killings of our languages, and those hands are unclean. It is time for some decisive steps that result in elevating our official indigenous languages to places of equity and opportunity. I ask

you to challenge yourself to fight the urge to do what feels normal and to sit in silence and listen to those who suffered.

For every child that was hit over the hands with a ruler for speaking their language, we need a language nest that is state-sponsored and promoted as a program that we refuse to allow to fail. For every adult who is now challenged with their concept of identity and self-worth, we need a government that reaches out to them and understands that doing the right thing is neither liberal nor conservative but is decisively human. Put money into this. Build programs that will endure.

I have been in these halls pushing for a change that I hear when I listen to the old people. When we conclude our work and hand things over to the next generation, my hope is that we can tell them that we took an honest look at things, and we did our best for them and their ancestors. Some of the proposed changes might make you nervous, but that fear is not based in fact or truth – only speculation that what happened and what is happening must be the right thing.

We are a people of tremendous opportunity, and we are going to take it. Our council has inherited lifetimes of labor on this topic, and we are ready to present our recommendations for change. In the tomorrow I envision, we are all enriched by the languages of this land as «sh yáa awudanéix'i» (self-respecting people) and «aan yátx'i» (children of the land).

[8:43:32 AM](#)

MR. TWITCHELL summarized five points from his written testimony, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

1. support for immersion programs. The state needs to get behind immersion programs for children (language nests

& schools) and adults (adult immersion & master-apprentice). They should declare them officially sponsored activities that we collectively refuse to allow to fail, and we find ways to fund them. We model them after successful programs in Hawaiian and Mohawk communities, and develop templates for all our languages.

2. an official apology from the State of Alaska, admitting wrongdoing and condemning the development of racist hierarchies and activities. Within that is a commitment to repair what has been broken by sponsoring listening sessions throughout Alaska and developing an action plan with the understanding that monumental changes are needed in order to avoid committing genocide.
3. a comprehensive state-sponsored survey of the state of all the languages in Alaska, focusing on developing the capacity within each language to track the number of existing speakers and new speakers that are being gained, with special celebrations for the addition of new speakers.
4. language normalization activities that involve restoring Alaska Native placenames (making them official and making sure they are used), and placement of appropriate Alaska Native languages in public spaces.
5. language restoration commitment through unity and showing that our languages are vital and values by making them a required component for high school graduation.

Gunalchéesh • Háw'aa • Quayana • Mahalo

[8:45:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND said she was moved by Mr. Twitchell's testimony. She shared that she was born into a Greek-American family in New York City, and she did not speak English until she was in Kindergarten. She said she appreciates being able to speak one's language. She mentioned the immersion language programs established by the school districts a number of years

ago in the Yukon/Kuskokwim area and asked Mr. Twitchell if he knows how successful they were in restoring those communities.

MR. TWITCHELL answered yes. He said ANLPAC works with its members across the state. He remarked, "That is one of the ... hallmark programs, as far as language retention." He said the language preserved there is Yupik. He stated that he thinks there is a generational shift happening, and he expressed his hope that the program is elevated to the point where the State of Alaska recognizes it as one of the best.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND observed that that program focuses solely on "the Yupik and Chupik in that area" and there are 18 other languages in the state. She asked if there are any other immersion programs that currently exist.

MR. TWITCHELL answered yes. He specified there are language nests and language schools. He offered his understanding that there is one school in the Yupik territory and there are several language nests: one recently opened in Kodiak; two recently opened in Fairbanks; one has been running for a long time in Kotzebue; one recently opened in Yakutat; and one is in the process of opening in Juneau this fall. He expressed his hope that "these are just sort of isolated pockets" and that an Alaska Native School Board could be developed. He said ANLPAC looks at both the Hawaiian and Maori models.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND opined that the idea of having an Alaska Native School Board is a wonderful one.

[8:48:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER imparted his background in English and opined that language, as it intersects with culture, is fascinating. He said he thinks the committee would change history; it would, but it cannot. What the committee has to consider is a resolution asking the governor to issue an administrative order recognizing linguistic emergency; it does not ask the legislature to declare the emergency. He asked Mr. Twitchell if he has approached the governor to request such a declaration.

MR. TWITCHELL said [ANLPAC] has been in communication with the Office of the Lieutenant Governor since the inception of the idea, by Sarah Dybdahl at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) listening session in October [2017]. He offered his understanding that today may be the first time that ANLPAC has testified before a legislative body and for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of the issue and illustrating what it would like to see in an administrative order. In response to a follow-up question, he said he has not heard the governor say he would not do this without the urging of the legislature. He noted that House Bill 216, which asked that Alaska Native languages be considered the official language of the state, was considered by many to be just a symbolic act.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER interjected, "It's actually in the language of the resolution."

MR. TWITCHELL said a friend, who was a Vietnam veteran, had testified about the experience of coming back from a war without recognition and that at some point there was a small ceremony to recognize those veterans. He indicated that the idea behind "getting unanimous voices" is to highlight the issue - "it adds to our momentum."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that a governor can issue an executive order without the intervention of the legislature, and he expressed interest in finding out if Governor Walker placed "any conditions" on this or "suggested this as a ... tactic." He then asked Mr. Twitchell to expound on the relation between language and culture.

MR. TWITCHELL answered that the two are intertwined, although a person can have cultural fluency without language fluency and vice versa. For example, a Tlingit person could know songs and know about potlatch and hunting and fishing but might not speak the language. Conversely, someone who is "someone disconnected from these cultural activities" could speak the Tlingit language fluently in a classroom without understanding "some of the cultural depth" of the language. He said it is easier to have a revival of culture than language. He stated, "A post-colonized

world is not always friendly towards having multiple languages existing in the same space." He talked about the dancing and energy during Celebration, which takes place in early June [biennially, in Juneau, Alaska]. He said Hawaiians noticed the division between culture and language in Hawai'i and made efforts to change it. For example, someone should not learn hula without learning the Hawaiian that is spoken with it. Without the connection, he said, the cultural ceremonies "lose the things that they're rooted to." He concluded, "So, there are specific words that connect to concepts and that connect you to ancestors and that connect you to each other."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said he went to school with Jewish children who attended Hebrew school. He added that he had taken French in school. He said, "I'd like to think that government cannot block culture and that a culture will survive and thrive - or maybe just survive - in the face of government action. I'm also therefore, on the converse side, concerned that government cannot support culture." He asked Mr. Twitchell if government support of Alaska Native language can be adequate to support the Alaska Native culture or if it is "part of the whole thing."

MR. TWITCHELL responded that government can and has limited cultural activities. When governance was handed over to missionaries, following the comity plan issued by Sheldon Jackson, he said, missionaries were established as governing bodies that would decide whether or not certain cultural activities were allowed. Mask dancing and language speaking and some ceremonies were banished. He said, "You can't just squash people out and expect them to ... just bounce back." He said the discussion is not about race; it is about people, and governments, and languages, and it is difficult to piece them out from each other. Mr. Twitchell said sometimes when there are initiatives, people will question why they are not included in the proposed benefit, but in terms of language, he said, "Anybody could come to the language." He said there are plenty of non-Tlingit people learning Tlingit, and he offered his understanding that those people's lives are enriched. He said, "We're focused on the languages, with the belief that the language has a health impact, and part of that health impact is culture." He quoted Walter Soboleff as saying, "People who know

who they are don't kill themselves." People without a root tend to drift, which is something Mr. Twitchell said he has witnessed in areas where indigenous people have been colonized and forced to live without choice, which he said is a government action. He mentioned the lack of history given to students, and that without that history it may seem like Alaska Native languages are just fading away without any particular reason. He suggested that where there were once government sponsored activities that caused this, there need to be government sponsored activities to [support] the languages. He opined, "If we all just moved to Greece or to France and we decided to never learn that language, it would just be strange, but it's acceptable here in America."

[8:58:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND pointed out that a map of Alaska stretches across the entire Lower 48. She said Greece is a small country of approximately 700-800 million people; millions more [people with Greek ancestry] live around the world; there are approximately 600 Greek Orthodox churches in North America; each church holds a festival annually to celebrate Greek culture. She stated that there are not that many Alaska Natives left "on the land" - perhaps only a few hundred thousand. Representative Drummond stated that for that reason she is concerned and supports calling [the state of Alaska Native languages] an emergency. She imparted she had read that Chinese and Greek are two languages that have remained unchanged. She said [Alaska Natives] cannot [save their languages] by themselves; they need to be supported. She said that as the chair of the House Education Standing Committee, she would work toward creating an Alaska Native School Board.

MR. TWITCHELL noted that fewer than 10 percent of Alaska Native people can speak in their language, a circumstance he characterized as dreadful.

[9:01:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER surmised that it is easier for the mechanism of government to break up culture rather than to

support it. He asked if it would help resolve the linguistic emergency to have non-Natives learn to speak Alaska Native languages or if it was important that Alaska Natives speak the languages.

MR. TWITCHELL answered that he thinks both things are important. He said [language] is a key component of who indigenous populations are. He said Native language can help non-Native people connect to a place in a different way. He explained the interconnectivity between a place name [and how that name is repeated in the name of] a river and a school. He said he thinks it is important for people in Alaska to understand that they are part of the colonial process, which unfortunately for Native Alaskans was one that went from negotiation to removal to elimination. The elimination started through warfare and then was manifested by forced assimilation. He said a person either can become complicit in that or decide this is a bad idea. He reiterated that people do not need to feel bad about what happened in the past; they just need to "do better now." He concluded, "And so, I think it's important that everybody achieves some basic level of proficiency, and I think it enriches their experience wherever they live in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said he had prepared for today's meeting with some trepidation, because HCR 19 asks the legislature to make a request of the governor that could have been made directly to the governor. However, he acknowledged there is a lot of emotion surrounding this issue, including "pain, hurt pride, grievance, and loss." He said that puts the legislature "on this spot." He cautioned people not to "look at this as you're either for us or against us." He posed the question of whether it is possible to support Alaska Natives and Alaska Native culture and people but not support HCR 19. He said the proposed concurrent resolution asks the legislature to get government involved in repairing that which government caused in the past. He said he doesn't know to what extent a culture that relies on government to support it is "in the best place." He observed some steps have been mentioned, and he asked what the end goal is.

MR. TWITCHELL answered, "I don't know if we ever get to a safe place." He said there are 20 Alaska Native languages. He offered his understanding that over 12 of them have only 100 speakers left; 4 or 5 of them have fewer than 10 speakers left. He indicated that it is difficult to understand why, after hearing from elders and about what the U.S. and the education system have done, anyone would vote "no." He said the no votes are heavy, and the reasons given by those who vote no is that this is not the responsibility of the government. Mr. Twitchell said English and European culture is not the only culture, but it is "the default" - it is what is studied. He questioned how many high school students would be able to show on a map where the 20 languages are but said they could name 20 states, 20 countries, and 20 presidents. He indicated that [not teaching Alaska Native culture and languages sends the message that] "those people aren't really important." Hierarchies have set up systems of privilege and suffering, he said, and "all we have to do is do what feels normal, and those hierarchies continue." He said suffering is probably invisible to people in power.

MR. TWITCHELL said one solution is to change what it means to be an Alaskan and to be educated. People said Alaska Native languages were of no value, but that was before they ever learned anything about them, he said. He encouraged educated and informed decisions be made. He said he is open to hearing why HCR 19 might be a bad idea. He said some people might say that the proposed concurrent resolution would be "privileging Alaska Native people," but he argued that is not the case, because currently the system blatantly privileges non-indigenous people by making them the default - "the standardized knowledge that you have to acquire." He concluded, "But we say, 'Okay, a portion of that can be indigenous people, too, because they're here; they've been here; they're going to be here.'"

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said he takes the issue seriously. He said regardless of what the government does, Native youth learning the languages and passing that knowledge down to their children will "win the battle at that level." He wished success to Mr. Twitchell.

[9:09:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS reflected upon government's role, both in the past and as a force for good. He asked Mr. Twitchell to speak about language programs, school funding, grassroots efforts in teaching Native languages, and how they all tie together. He offered his understanding that Representative Saddler had spoke to a point that "just through a law you can't change things." He clarified that he wants to hear Mr. Twitchell's perspective regarding the ability of investment and support in the public sector to be "a tide that rises a lot of boats, including boats that aren't at all affiliated with government."

MR. TWITCHELL first shared an anecdote, an experience he had at a ceremony in Hawai'i for preschoolers moving on to Kindergarten. He said there were hundreds of people, a teacher speaking in Hawaiian, and each child spoke in Hawaiian and received a response from their parents in the language. The friend who had invited Mr. Twitchell was moved to tears and could only muster, "Intergenerational Transmission." He said many of the children were crying but "we didn't feel the weight of the impending death of everything." His friend later explained his tears: the parents of those children were his students as children when he first started teaching. Mr. Twitchell said he wondered how [Alaska Natives] could get to this point. He said he thinks there currently is momentum going in the right direction; there are many people who have been fighting their whole lives "who might have a chance to see this." He said he wants to open the door to "that language immersion school" before some of the elders are gone but "we're missing the boat." He said he has tried to work with local school districts, with the superintendent, and with others to build a program that functions only in Tlingit, but "they just can't say, 'Yes'." He said the graduation rate among Alaska Natives is horrible and he cannot understand why something different is not being done. He said it comes back to him asking, "Am I important? Are we as a people important? Can that happen that we feel this sense of being important?"

MR. TWITCHELL said Hawai'i once was down to 100-200 speakers of the Hawaiian language; now the state has over 10,000. He

indicated that state sponsorship was involved in the effort to restore the Hawaiian language. He said graduation rates in Hawai'i grew to a 20-year history of a 100 percent graduation rate and an 80 percent college placement rate. He said people have asked how children being taught Tlingit are going to be prepared for the "real" and modern world, and he said Tlingit people are real and modern.

MR. TWITCHELL indicated that his sister, Liz Medicine Crow, said, "Don't play devil's advocate." Instead consider where thoughts come from and how they can be analyzed "in the context of these greater things." He said "we" stand upon a platform that was built and says that "these guys are better; these guys are worse." He said there still exist today laws in the U.S. Supreme Court that say indigenous people are inferior. He said he is amazed that those laws have not been rescinded. He said a choice can be made to make laws that focus on the languages. People can realize that "we have some keys in our pocket; we can open some door."

[9:17:02 AM](#)

MARTIN STEPETIN stated that out of all the testimony he has given on behalf of his people and the future, this testimony is the most important. He expressed appreciation for all the questions that have been asked to figure out what can be done to help. He said he thinks HCR 19 asks for help not just from the governor but from the legislature, and if the legislature was to help, "it would have a lot more meaning." Mr. Stepetin said he is Aleut and his wife is of Tlingit and Japanese ancestry. He said one reason his family moved to Juneau is because the Tlingit culture is strong; it has been more resilient through colonization. There are more Tlingit speakers than Aleut speakers. He said he wants to move home but wants his children to be close to one of their cultures and they love Tlingit dancing. He said he signed them up for a program so that they can start learning the language. He suggested making it a law that children have to learn some form of indigenous language in school. He said while he does not have the level of education of some people in the room, the issue is near and dear to his

heart. He noted that he had brought his children in the room with him.

[9:23:31 AM](#)

LIZ MEDICINE CROW, First Alaskans Institute, testified that she is Tlingit and Haida; she is Eagle; her crest is the Hummingbird. She talked about her grandparents and parents. She said her mother, who was present in the room, is a language learner who taught her. She stated that when the experts say [this issue is one that should be heard], "these are the people that we have decided we should listen to." She said she feels pride to listen to "the love and the dedication to something that is so big many cannot even imagine how we start to deal with this." She said there is an analogy that asks, "How do you eat an elephant?" The answer is, "One bite at a time." She said the analogy does not work in Alaska, and she offered a substitute: "How do you eat a whale?" She said it is not one bite at a time; it is "by community" and "by a collective responsibility to the land and to one another." She remarked on Mr. Stepetin's having encouraged the committee to ask questions. She recalled Mr. Twitchell's comments regarding the connection between Alaska Natives knowing their languages and being healthy and making good life choices. She commented that she is blessed to be able to be here to speak on this issue.

[9:27:57 AM](#)

MS. MEDICINE CROW said in 1935 her grandmother graduated from Sheldon Jackson and was sent to Ashville Normal Teacher's College in North Carolina. She traveled there on her own via steam ship to Seattle, then train to Chicago and then to North Carolina. She stayed there for four years, unable to come home for the holidays, until she graduated in 1939 with a Bachelor of Science in Education. Ms. Medicine Crow said her grandmother would combat loneliness by imagining conversations in Haida with her mother. She said her grandmother's perseverance and resilience were gifts she inherited, and now she herself is an adult language learner, which is difficult. She said there are things that could be done to make [learning language] more accessible and to overcome barriers.

9:30:40 AM

MS. MEDICINE CROW said HCR 19 is calling upon the legislature to show its support and counteract history by "taking proactive, well-thought action." In showing interest in the issue, the governor, the legislator, and many others support prevention of a human rights catastrophe. She said if the issue is not addressed, "we are on the verge of losing the essence of our humanity and the soul of what Alaska can and should be." She said the government, churches, and businesses "worked together to get us where we are today," and "the way to heal that history is to make new history" and "be on the right side of history."

MS. MEDICINE CROW said First Alaskans Institute is involved in a truth, racial healing, and transformation endeavor, with healing being at the center. She explained that transformation involves a metamorphosis much like that of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. What was done in the past cannot be changed, but from this moment forward those wrongs can be put right. She said she knew this is possible when she read the call for administrative support [under HCR 19]. She said, "We look to the opportunity to partner with the legislature to be able to serve our community by giving them a place to heal."

9:35:14 AM

MS. MEDICINE CROW recalled a question that had been asked as to whether [HCR 19] was an opportunity for Alaska Natives to learn languages or for all Alaskans to know Alaska Native languages, and she said the answer is it is for [all Alaskans]. She noted, "The difference is that it requires so much more healing as a[n] indigenous person, so we have to create a network to support that." She explained that every time she used to stand up to introduce herself in her language, she would "go blank, and English would come out." She said she had to take an immersion program with some of her sisters to break down that barrier inside her mind and to start "healing that hurt." She said she also participated in a canoe journey, paddling eight days from her village, which also helped. Now, when she hears [Native Alaskan] experts talking about what needs to happen, she can

support those recommendations, because she trusts their knowledge and has her own experience from which to draw. On behalf of First Alaskans Institute, she stated support of HCR 19. She thanked the committee in both Tlingit and Haida.

[9:36:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said HCR 19 says nothing about truth and reconciliation; it speaks to the legislature to encourage the governor to work with the legislature to "work to ensure the survival of 20 Alaska Native languages" and "to establish policies that prioritize survival and continued use." He said if truth and reconciliation is the goal of Ms. Medicine Crow, he encourages her to bring forth specific legislation to that purpose.

MS. MEDICINE CROW agreed that HCR 19 "doesn't say that," but there are efforts underway to "create a place that allows for the advancement of this healing that is necessarily a part of moving forward."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER responded, "We are in agreement."

[9:38:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS remarked that perhaps this [conversation] is "good fodder" for creating such legislation.

[9:39:40 AM](#)

NANCY BARNES, Member, Juneau Sm'algyax Group, began her testimony speaking in her Native language of Sm'algyax. She then shared that she is of the Eagle moiety and is both Tsimshian and Aleutiq. She said she is "a life-time Sm'algyax learner." She said the Juneau Sm'algyax Group supports HCR 19. She said Alaska indigenous languages are at a critical point. She said a Tsimshian talking circle was started in 2013, and a group would gather at her home, using a talking dictionary. The group's teacher, Donna May Roberts, and her husband, Tony Roberts, took part in the group. She said Ms. Roberts came to Juneau in 2002 and taught a week-long total physical response

(TPR) class. Ms. Barnes said Ms. Roberts taught her a word - magwa'ala - which is the most severe winter storm that comes only once every 100-200 years and for which preparation is difficult. She indicated that Ms. Roberts told the group, "Our language is in a state of magwa'ala now." Ms. Barnes stated, "At that time we had 30 fluent speakers; we have 6 on the United States side."

MS. BARNES said today amazing efforts are being made by the Haayk Foundation in Metlakatla; Donna May Roberts, in Metlakatla; Terry Burr, in Ketchikan; Marcella Asicksic, in Anchorage; and Mique'l Dangeli, in British Columbia, Canada. She said for over two years, the group has practiced its language every Saturday. Terry Burr is teaching them on line, with elder, John Reese, who is 92 years of age. She said President Richard Peterson, from Central Council Tlingit and Haida Tribes has allowed the group to use rooms and the technology to reach out to many areas. She said, "He knows that Native languages are in a state of magwa'ala." She credited Alfie Price, who works for Central Council, for doing a wonderful job ensuring that the group has materials and the logistics to keep going.

MS. BARNES urged support of HCR 19. She cited language on page 2, lines 17-20, which read as follows:

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature encourages the Governor, in cooperation with the legislature, to work with Alaska Native organizations to initiate and strengthen, as appropriate, legislative and policy measures that prioritize the survival and continued use of Alaska Native languages

MS. BARNES said HCR 19 would "give us a good statement to carry on." She said many gather on their own but need tools and support.

[9:44:23 AM](#)

MS. BARNES, in response to Representative Saddler, said she had worked on Rural and Native Affairs under Governors Cowper,

Hickel, and Knowles and Senator Kookesh and Representative Kreiss-Tomkins.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER highlighted the words "prioritize the survival" from the excerpt of HCR 19 Ms. Barnes had quoted. He asked what that means to Ms. Barnes.

[9:45:10 AM](#)

MS. BARNES indicated it means [providing] language material and language opportunities through the school districts and tribal organizations and the legislature. She reemphasized the need for support and recognition that "we are in the state of magwa'ala." In response to a follow-up question, she indicated a focus on that which is critical rather than distinguishing priority.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER emphasized that to prioritize something means to give it higher importance than something else; therefore, he suggested that if Ms. Barnes is not comfortable doing so, perhaps the word "prioritize" should not be used in HCR 19 and instead the focus would be to make everything as important as everything else.

MS. BARNES responded, "Probably do some wordsmithing on that."

[9:47:54 AM](#)

DON BREMNER testified that his parents were prevented from speaking their language and practicing their culture in schools and in public. He stated support for HCR 19 and surmised that Governor Bill Walker would support it. In terms of history, Mr. Bremner described the English language as a malignant tumor in his mind, body, and spirit. He said compelling generations to speak English is "evil-intentioned." He said the younger people who testified did so in the spirit of cooperation; however, his generation and the generation before him grew up fighting the state and federal government "for everything we have to be Native." He said, "We set the base for them to speak here like they're speaking, but we fought for this. So, now, we're getting crumbs pushed off our table, where before we had a huge,

massive piece with our languages - culture." The issue is the total extinction of Native languages.

MR. BREMNER referenced the 1910 U.S. Census and said at that time if a person did not speak English, he/she was considered illiterate. He questioned, "How do you deal with that? How do you live with that? How do you wake up in the morning in your own country and go out there and be illiterate?" In 1910 there were an estimate 25,000 Native Alaskans, 56.6 percent of which spoke only in their Native language. Just 43 years earlier, in 1867, all Natives spoke in their Native language. Using the calculation of 56.6 percent, Mr. Bremner said that in 1910, 174 of the 307 Tlingit living in Yakutat spoke in their Native language. Today there are approximately 211 Tlingit living in Yakutat and only one elder healthy enough to teach the language, which he said is .0047393364 percent today.

[9:51:59 AM](#)

MR. BREMNER posed the question, "What positive steps can we take in the right direction?" He answered that [HCR 19] is a step in the right direction - "a lifeline" thrown to Native people in Alaska. On a personal level, he said he is done fighting. He mentioned again the younger people who are willing to work with [the state] cooperatively but emphasized that [Native people] have demonstrated, since before Alaska became a state, that "we could coexist with you" and that "our Native languages can coexist with you." He opined, "I think it's important for all of us to be bilingual, with English and with our Native languages in the state." He concluded:

There are state policies, state education standards, and state advertising and promotion. These are the things that pushed us out into just an English world. So, these are the three areas that we need to work with.

MR. BREMNER told committee members that they are doing a good job here today. He thanked them in Tlingit, with "Gunalchéesh."

[9:54:02 AM](#)

DELLA CHENEY gave her Tlingit and Haida names and said she was born and raised in Kake, Alaska. She said she worked in the Office of the Governor for 10 years, taught for 10 years, worked at Sheldon Jackson College, and worked as a city administrator, and she loves the life she has lived and where she lives. She said there are many ways of looking at "what we have experienced as Alaska Native people." She said her mother was 10 years of age when she was sent to boarding school and could only speak Haida. She said some children at the boarding schools were just five years of age. She said the children at the boarding schools were not nurtured and did not understand what was happening to them. She stated, "Some people didn't come back home. So, my friend, Bob Sam, is bringing them back from Carlisle, because that's where they passed. That's all the way across the country." She said some who did come home, "like from Vietnam," did not know what had happened to them or what to do, and they had no support."

MS. CHENEY said she had just attended a workshop on "cultural relative teaching" which taught that ethnic groups anywhere in the U.S. have not been recognized and are invisible in their own world. She added, "So, we don't know how to grapple with that education from a place of comfort, from a place of nurturing, from a place of love. So, we're doing the best we can with what we have." She said when her parents came home [from boarding school], they had no skills for parenting or cultural ways of knowing." She added, "Thank the Lord they both could speak their language 'til they left us and became powerful leaders in the state." She said with that knowledge of their language and culture, her parents had "a firm ground to walk on." She said she had that, too, because of the love of her parents and because she was never sent to boarding school. She said she was born and raised in a community where she knew her parents, siblings, cousins, and full extended family. She stated, "So, the love in me is bigger than some of those people who came home without it and are so not sure what's happened to them."

MS. CHENEY expressed appreciation to the committee for its consideration of HCR 19, and she expressed hope that its members will see that "we want to move and grapple with education from a

place of education and nurturing." She thanked them in Tlingit, with "Gunalchéesh."

[10:00:24 AM](#)

ALISON MARKS related that she is a traditional artist and carver. She said Alaska Native languages are part of the state's history, having existed pre-contact and during every major event since. She said those in the Last Frontier pride themselves on being different from those in the Lower 48, and if Alaska's languages are allowed to die, the state will be moving further away from that which makes it unique. She mentioned Mr. Twitchell's testimony and said if the polar bear were to become extinct Alaska would lose "a vital and vibrant thread in Alaska's tapestry." She proffered the same could be said about Alaska's Native languages. Ms. Marks said the Tlingit language contains sounds that are not heard in any other language. The extinction of Alaska Native languages is the result of "top-down" policies, with governing bodies and education systems actively repressing Native languages. Ms. Marks concluded, "This repression is so ingrained in us today that we need these top-down policies to support our languages, and we need the support of our governing bodies to ensure the revitalization of our languages."

[10:03:19 AM](#)

SARAH DYBDAHL, Manager, Cultural Heritage and Education, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, testified first in her Native language and then translated that she is originally from Klawock, Alaska, and she is Tlingit. She said Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska is the largest [federally] recognized tribe in Alaska, representing 30,000 tribal citizens, and supports HCR 19. She noted that Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska provided a letter [included in the committee]. In the letter is a report, and in appendix e is a list of all the Alaska Native programs in Alaska that represents over 40 years of effort to begin to "see the tide change amongst our languages."

MS. DYBDAHL said the late Clarence Jackson had told a story about a tsunami that took place at Lituya Bay and one tree that had been left. The tree asked, "Can you hear me? Trees on the other side that had grown back answered, "We hear you." She said the legislative body is being asked to hear Native Alaskans, because "being heard is going to allow the forest - our languages - to grow." She said, "It's not zero sum for our language prioritized. ... We're asking for equal advancement of our languages - advancement of our way of life." Ms. Dybdahl said her son takes part in an optional [emphasis on "optional"] Tlingit Cultural Language and Literacy Program at his school, but unlike other languages taught at the school, there is no school bus offered; parents are responsible for bringing their children to Harborview Elementary School for the program. She imparted that when she told her son she would be speaking before Representatives today, he said he wishes there would be a simple fix that makes it so Alaska Native languages could be learned in school, because he said he has no use for French or Spanish. She said her son asked, "Can the State of Alaska start doing things smarter rather than harder?" Ms. Dybdahl thanked the committee, with "Gunalchéesh."

[10:08:59 AM](#)

STUART McDONALD, Superintendent, North Slope Borough School District, testified that his name was fodder for ribbing; he was called Stuart Little and Old MacDonald. He said it was the preservation of Gaelic language and culture by his family that helped him "preserve a different identity." He said in the 1990s he was the Clan Donald USA Northwest Region Alaska Commissioner and would greet people in Gaelic. He then stated a phrase in Inupiaq. He said, "These are more than words; they are actual frameworks of conceptual thinking."

MR. McDONALD proposed, "If we worry about low graduation rates, then let's follow the numbers." He told committee members to pay attention to previous testimony about a school in Hawai'i with 100 percent graduation rate. He relayed that in 2016, the North Slope Borough School District had a 58 percent graduation rate and has for seven years been developing an Inupiaq education framework. In 2017, the graduation rate was 77

percent. He said the district has fully integrated Inupiaq into its language arts program for "a different perspective to get a different result." He stated, "Our job as educators is to build a positive, person, powerful future vision for our students that connects them to education." He said HCR 19 uses the word "priority." He asked committee members to imagine a cooperation with the legislature that can determine what action the government can take. He talked about collecting data that shows how many students are increasing their fluency in another language and creating policies and rules like Hawai'i has where 15 percent of all contracts and business exchanges are required to be in the regional language. Mr. McDonald stated that research shows that bilingual students are superior students; they perform better, are better connected, and are a stronger academic voice with more power than a mono-linguistic student. He said many steps have been taken and it is time to "grab ahold of what's possible here and make a huge difference in the way we go about business in Alaska." He said, "I think in the long run it will be good for Alaska - good for all of us, non-Native and Native alike - it's the right move."

MR. McDONALD related that the district is continuing work in language nests. It is trying to capture fluent speakers in a preschool program. It is one of the few places in the state that has such a program for that age. He said the district is working with the community to take the preservation of language seriously. He said it is something that can be supported and legitimized by government. He added, "Not because government's going to help, but when government allows the reporting and acknowledges the need for the presence of the language and everything that we do, then it helps local effort be legitimized and validated."

[10:15:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked Mr. McDonald if he has had a chance to consider a recommendation from the Alaska Education Challenge, which the governor and state school board brought forward last year regarding the creation of an option for self-governance. The recommendation was for "compacting the delivery

of education between the State of Alaska and tribes or tribally empowered Alaska Native organizations."

MR. McDONALD answered yes. He said existing rules allow local school boards to work with their communities and the state, using state and federal dollars, "to accomplish everything that exists within the concept of the compact now"; however, spelling out the rules and understanding what is allowable now is not clear from district to district. He opined that as long as compacting is not "an exit from the state to step away from responsibility of public education in our communities," it is a good step forward. He said the concept of "public school" must be preserved. He said there are people from all over the world in the North Slope. He indicated that when someone greets him with "good morning" in Inupiaq, "she tells me it's critically important that this is a public school system for all students." He advised that compacting must not sacrifice that notion. He said this Alaska Education Challenge concept is a new one he would like to see developed. He said he thinks most of the tools needed to "make this go well" exist. He opined, "We need to take advantage of that strong voice in local control, backed and supported by our state in helping us with recording requirements and other things that would allow legitimizing our work and strengthening local control."

[10:19:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER offered his understanding that Mr. McDonald had emphasized that public schools are for all students.

MR. McDONALD said that's right. He said one of the early views of the melting pot of America was e pluribus unum, but a stronger view of the U.S. today is "e pluribus pluribus - for many, many." He stated, "It's a system that we need to play to our strengths and our diversity." He opined that HCR 19 is critical. Mr. McDonald said Gaelic survived because in the mid-'90s there was a Scottish independent movement that ensured that Gaelic was taught in parts of the world. Now the language is preserved with no worry it will parish. In Alaska, Native language will parish, he warned, if a similar move is not made.

He said, "The greatest experiment in the United States is the best experiment in the entire world of making sure that public school serves all and has room to focus on individual groups without excluding others."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER recollected that Mr. McDonald had said language is a framework of conceptual thinking that "we're pushing for different results." He directed attention to language on page 2, [within lines 10-12], of HCR 19, which read:

WHEREAS indigenous peoples should be able to provide education in the peoples' own languages in a manner that is appropriate to the peoples' cultural methods of teaching and learning;

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked Mr. McDonald if he thinks HCR 19 implies there is a necessity of changing public school instructional methods. He asked, "Does teaching German or Japanese or Spanish require cultural specific instructional methods?"

MR. McDONALD answered that happening now is the reinvention of mathematics and instruction and there are wonderful tools involved related to various types of math. He offered further details and encouraged the continued growth and development and incorporation of "the best of what's being borne out of other cultures." He reiterated that something different must be done in response to low performance rates of Alaska Natives and American Indians. He said that as an educator and superintendent, he thinks "we can do better" and there is room for discussion and for a change in the framework in education in order to address the needs of all students.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said changing the framework is a larger change than "the symbolic recognition of the official languages" and is different from what people might assume in having Alaska Native language as an adjunct language, such as Japanese, Russian, or German. He stated concern with "the vulcanization of the state" and possibly that of the education system "to have different methods of instruction in different languages." He

said the nation is multi-cultural and English is the language everyone speaks in order to understand each other.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked Mr. McDonald what "priority" means to him. For example, he asked Mr. McDonald if he thinks Alaska Native languages should be taught instead of Western languages or alongside them.

MR. McDONALD replied that when he served in Kodiak, English language learners had low performance levels, but when they were allowed to flourish in their first language, with English then incorporated, the success rate grew from 47 percent to 98-100 percent. He said that was done "without sacrificing anything." Regarding the Alaska language component, he said, "No one's asking for this resolution to be a one-size-fits-all silver bullet; it's a piece of a larger complex story, and it's a critical story." He said HCR 19 is a good step forward to tackle a complex issue. He assured that no one is saying that the state should do away with an entire education framework; the goal is to grow, develop, and mature the education framework to be an inclusive one where students "have a fighting chance not to be a statistic in the low-performing demographic."

MR. McDONALD said that in the interest of time, he would try to produce a written statement for the committee. He stated that he is in 100 percent agreement with most of the testimony that had been heard thus far. He continued as follows:

The parts that I might have a slight, different opinion on is purely borne out of my own personal ignorance, and I can't ... answer for a group of people any more than somebody could help understand why it's important to me to know that McDonald meant something more than Big Macs.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked again for Mr. McDonald's take on the word "priority".

MR. McDONALD, in response to Co-Chair Parish, deferred to the bill sponsor's staff and said he would submit the rest of his answer in writing.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER expressed keen interest in getting the answer from Mr. McDonald.

MR. McDONALD replied that he would respond in writing within two days.

[10:28:37 AM](#)

JODIE GATTI, Staff, Representative Dan Ortiz, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Ortiz, prime sponsor of HCR 19, stated that the specific language on page 2, lines 19-20, asks for "legislative and policy measures that prioritize the survival and continued use of Alaska Native languages" but does not specifically say that "we are going to prioritize it over other languages [or] teach it instead of other languages."

[10:29:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for confirmation that Ms. Gatti means that he should not interpret the language on page 2, line 19, as meaning that the resolution supports legislative policy measures prioritizing Alaska Native languages over any other languages.

MS. GATTI answered that's correct.

[10:30:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH ascertained that people still waiting to testify would be able to present their testimony at the next hearing of HCR 19. He held public testimony open.

[HCR 19 was held over.]

[10:31:40 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.