

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 20, 2017

8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair
Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator John Coghill
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gary Stevens

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

University of Alaska Board of Regents

Mary Hughes - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

David Piazza - Dillingham

Kent Runion - Nome

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

MARY HUGHES, Appointee
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee.

DAVID PIAZZA, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC)
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee.

KENT RUNION, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC)
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:35 AM](#)

CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Giessel, Coghill, and Chair Hughes.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

[8:01:01 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced that the only order of business would be three confirmation hearings. Mary Hughes is seeking a third term on the University of Alaska Board of Regents; David Piazza is seeking a second term on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; and Kent Runion is seeking a first term on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

University of Alaska Board of Regents

[8:01:42 AM](#)

MARY HUGHES, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, testified as an appointee. She provided her personal and professional background. She said she has been on the Board of Regents for 15 years. She shared that her family's priority has always been education. She referred to her resume and offered to answer questions.

[8:03:21 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES noted that she and Ms. Hughes are not related.

SENATOR BEGICH mentioned the importance of technology to education and the teacher training piece. He asked Ms. Hughes how the university will improve its teacher education program to ensure that teachers are skilled in technology.

[8:04:16 AM](#)

MS. HUGHES replied that the Board of Regents has been working on improving teacher education. She related that her family established a scholarship for future teachers. She addressed the two of the Regents Big Four, e-learning and teacher education.

The Regents took action in reformulating the way in which the university teaches education and the chancellor of UAS is charged with statewide teacher education in all forms, including distance education. The Board and the president feel it is important to increase the number of Alaskans teaching in Alaska schools, particularly in rural areas.

The third of the Big Four is to offer general education courses via distance education to change the way Alaska is educating and attracting students.

8:07:03 AM

SENATOR BEGICH asked what the fourth of the Big Four is.

MS. HUGHES replied that it is using developmental learning to address the need for remediation of incoming freshmen students.

SENATOR GIESSEL appreciated Ms. Hughes dedication to the university. She noted that now there are three main campuses and there is still a problem with credit transfers.

MS. HUGHES said they are working on a common calendar and common course numbers, the foundation of credit transfers. There have been improvements, but there are still some problems which they will try to fix. The president is also intervening to improve this issue. She believes the Strategic Pathways will lead the way toward improvements.

8:12:07 AM

CHAIR HUGHES commented that the process for improvement credit transfers began in 2002 and has been a long time coming.

SENATOR BEGICH agreed with Senator Giessel. He hoped it would be a priority for credits to be made transferable. He wished for a more significant commitment toward that end.

MS. HUGHES noted there are three separately accredited universities which are governed by three faculties. Credits are more transferrable now than in 2002. She said the goal is a seamless system. She provided a personal experience.

CHAIR HUGHES asked if remedial courses cost the same as regular courses and if students remain in those courses for more than a year.

8:16:23 AM

MS. HUGHES assumed that the remedial courses are not for credit but incur a cost. Students can be in those courses for two years. They are working on using co-education classes while students are still in high school. She opined that students must graduate learning how to think. The Regents remain concerned about remediation.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Ms. Hughes for her dedication. She suggested the possibility of doing away with remedial classes and having in-class tutoring.

She asked if the Board has looked at reducing the state subsidy.

MS. HUGHES said the general fund is decreasing. The university is funded by GF, research, and tuition, and the student population is decreasing. There is a need to reconfigure the university while keeping the quality of education. They are working on future budgets through Strategic Pathways to differentiate tuitions at each campus. Regents can approve a tuition increase as a possible solution.

[8:25:37 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony. She introduced Mr. Piazza.

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

DAVID PIAZZA, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC), testified as an appointee. He said he is Superintendent of the Southwest Region School District and would be filling the superintendent seat for the second year. He has been an educator for the past 32 years. He said he looks forward to continuing the PTPC. He stressed the importance of educators' adhering to the code of ethics. The PTPC provides educators with training to help prevent violations, as well as serves as an avenue for an accused individual to receive a fair and impartial review by their peers before any career impacting sanctions are imposed.

He related in 1966 the legislature established PTPC as an independent commission to be governed by members made up of representatives practicing their profession. He will continue to listen to and consider the facts presented, and work with the other members to ensure that the integrity of the teaching profession remains at the highest possible level.

[8:28:25 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH referred to recommendations from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) Performance Review that recommends improving efficiencies and reducing duplication between PTPC and the Teacher Certification Office.

MR. PIAZZA noted that PTPC is an independent peer review and he opined that it is not a duplication of efforts. The members are educators and if a code of ethics violation is put forth, those who are accused can be judged by their peers. There is no guarantee that DEED is staffed with those who have been educators.

[8:31:03 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL thanked Mr. Piazza for his service and thought his rural experience was important to PTPC. She asked what his experience with big issues PTPC has addressed in the years he has been on the commission.

MR. PIAZZA explained that each case is unique. He spoke of PTPC's efforts to provide and strengthen outreach to new educators regarding the code of ethics. He emphasized PTPC's message that educators are role models and cautioned that social media should reflect professional images and communication. Student/teacher relationships should remain professional.

CHAIR HUGHES asked if there is any public testimony. She thanked Mr. Piazza and introduced Mr. Runion.

[8:34:30 AM](#)

KENT RUNION, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC), testified as an appointee. He shared his professional background as an educator for ten years and he has worked both with students and teachers in the area of teacher rights. He said he can provide the perspective of rural Alaska. He believes that PTPC is an important body for protecting students, teachers, and the teaching profession. He said he is honored to be nominated to serve on the PTPC.

[8:35:24 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH thanked Mr. Runion for agreeing to serve. He asked Mr. Runion why he wants to serve.

MR. RUNION noted that the PTPC serves as protection for teachers, as well as for students and the profession. Teaching is a calling and PTPC acts as a protection for all teachers.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked him for his willingness to serve.

She closed public testimony.

8:37:11 AM

SENATOR COGHILL moved the appointments of David Piazza and Kent Runion for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, and Mary Hughes for the University of Alaska Board of Regents be forwarded to the joint session for consideration. This does not reflect an intent by any of the members to vote for or against the confirmation of the individuals during any further sessions.

CHAIR HUGHES stated that, seeing no objection, the names will be forwarded to the joint session.

8:38:40 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 8:38 a.m.