

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 9, 2018

10:29 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair  
Senator Cathy Giessel  
Senator Tom Begich  
Senator Shelley Hughes

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator John Coghill

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 15  
Proclaiming March 27, 2018, as Alaska Education and Sharing Day.

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SCR 15

SHORT TITLE: MARCH 27, 2018:AK EDUCATION & SHARING DAY

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) HUGHES

02/02/18	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/02/18	(S)	EDC
03/09/18	(S)	EDC AT 10:30 AM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

AIMEE BUSHNELL, Staff  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SCR 15 on behalf of the sponsor.

ROSEMARY LEBOWITZ, Representing Self  
Hoonah, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SCR 15.

RABBI MENACHAM MENDY GREENBERG  
Mat-Su Jewish Campus  
Wasilla, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SCR 15.

RABBI YOSEF GREENBERG  
Alaska Jewish Campus  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SCR 15.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:29:37 AM](#)

**CHAIR GARY STEVENS** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 10:29 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel, Hughes, Begich, and Chair Stevens.

#### **SCR 15-MARCH 27, 2018:AK EDUCATION & SHARING DAY**

#### **SCR15**

[10:30:00 AM](#)

**CHAIR STEVENS** announced the consideration of SCR 15 and his intent to hold and hear the resolution.

[10:30:27 AM](#)

**SENATOR HUGHES**, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SCR 15, said this resolution focuses recognition on the importance of values, character development, and ethics as part of a student's education in order to become engaged, caring, responsible citizens. Since 1978, every president has proclaimed Education and Sharing Day to honor the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who dedicated his life to fostering the importance of character development, compassion, and service. Every president has declared this at the national level. They recognize the importance of having these discussions and for communities and families to be aware of it.

[10:33:24 AM](#)

**SENATOR HUGHES** said Rebbe Menachem did the first menorah community lighting in Philadelphia. She shared that she had joined Rabbi Mendy Greenberg, who leads the Jewish community in her area, in Palmer for a community menorah lighting. Rebbe Menachem rescued many Jewish youth from Iran during the Iranian hostage situation in 1979. He lived from 1902 until 1994. He was born in Russia, now Ukraine. He came to New York in 1941. He was

considered by many to be a genius. He spoke six languages. He had a love for America, but reached out around the world. In light of International Women's Day yesterday, she noted that he included young women in the education of the Torah.

[10:34:57 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said the resolution is not telling schools to teach a certain set of morals or values, but to encourage families, communities, and leaders of places of worship to have discussions about those ideas with youth in the state.

[10:35:27 AM](#)

AIMEE BUSHNELL, Staff, Senator Shelley Hughes, Alaska State Legislature, presented SCR 15 on behalf of the sponsor. She said they are pleased to see many letters supporting the resolution.

[10:36:14 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said this is the right committee for issues like this. One of the reasons for public education is to develop citizens. He asked what does "rebbe" mean.

[10:36:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she is not an expert in the Chabad Lubavitch faith, but she knows it is a post that only one person holds in the world. Rebbe Menachem assumed the post in 1950 when the prior rebbe passed away.

[10:37:24 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked for an explanation of the Seven Noahide Laws referred to in the resolution.

[10:37:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said they came before the ten commandments. They are considered the basis of fundamental human rights.

[10:38:25 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said he appreciates the information and history. He asked how many presidents had proclaimed Education and Sharing Day.

[10:38:54 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said every president in every year since 1978, which now makes 40 years.

[10:40:08 AM](#)

ROSEMARY LEBOWITZ, Representing Self, supported SCR 15. She said these values are important for children. Hearing of veterans who

come back with trauma and commit suicide makes her think that these types of values are more important than many educators realize. Academic training seems to be the most important thing in college, but values and character building are highly significant. Alaska has a higher rate of suicide than other states. In Alaska students need a moral compass.

[10:42:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked how many years she has taught.

[10:42:31 AM](#)

MS. LEBOWITZ said she is still teaching. It never stops.

CHAIR STEVENS said academics are important, but teaching ethics is also important.

[10:43:17 AM](#)

MS. LEBOWITZ said Rabbi Mendy is a good friend of theirs. She recounted that about 20 years ago, she was in New York City, which was a rare occurrence. That week the New York Times had a Sunday supplement on Rebbe Meerscham, which was the first time she had heard of him. She noted that Rabbi Mendy had a personal encounter with the Rebbe in his childhood.

[10:45:30 AM](#)

RABBI MENACHAM MENDY GREENBERG, Mat-Su Jewish Campus, Wasilla, Alaska, supported SCR 15. He said so much emphasis is placed on preparing kids to be successful in their material and physical lives. For many reasons, very little emphasis is placed on character building and moral, spiritual, and ethical awareness. Today all agree that to strengthen education from the beginning, a child should know that being good, kind, and honest people is the most important thing. If the main focus is to be successful in careers, everything might be okay to become successful, including cheating and lying. It is important to bring this message to parents and educators. When people pass away, the most important part of the eulogy is not whether they were successful business people, but whether they were good people. So much attention is spent on successful careers and not eulogy values, what really counts, what really matters.

[10:48:48 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked him to explain the term rebbe.

[10:49:16 AM](#)

RABBI MENDY GREENBERG said the general term rebbe means rabbi, teacher. Every rabbi is a rebbe, but then there is the Rebbe.

The Rebbe represents a great spiritual leader, represents the leader of the Chabad movement and in a more general way, a spiritual leader of all humankind. President Jimmy Carter and the Congress felt it was important to recognize his birthday as a date for all of the citizens of the United States. His impact and his message resonate with all people. He is a global personality, beyond the Hasidic Jewish group. He connects with everyone. Twenty-two years after his passing, his message still has impact. After the Parkland, Florida, attack, a representative of the rebbe spoke to the governor of Florida about schools starting the day with a moment of silence to think about the morals and values that their parents would help them come up with. Statistics show that a moment of silence helps calm children and has a positive effect on academic studies. The Rebbe is a global leader who touches the hearts of all citizens.

[10:52:47 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked him to explain the Seven Noahide Laws.

MR. M. GREENBERG said in their tradition, the Seven Noahide Laws are universal laws given to Adam and Eve and to Noah after the great flood. They are the bedrock of any civilization. The laws of people are only as strong as the people are. People change laws as they see fit, which is good, but there must be something beyond and above people. For example, it is immoral to kill, but sometimes people's minds play with them and tell them it is sometimes moral to do something terrible. During the Holocaust, it made sense to scientists, professors, doctors, an entire progressive country, that millions should be killed. When thou shalt not murder is only a human idea, it is only as strong as the people decide to be. When it comes from a supreme being, then it is never acceptable.

[10:55:48 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked him to share his personal engagement with the Rebbe through the Sunday dollar program, as a historical tidbit.

[10:56:47 AM](#)

MR. M. GREENBERG said that the Rebbe advocated charity and the idea that every child should be a giver. A charity box should be everywhere. The nature of giving is to be always doing good for others. When he was about 84 years old in 1986, he would stand on the street for hours distributing dollar bills to whomever came. The message of the dollar was to make people an emissary of his with the message that when two people meet, they should do good for a third. Everyone could have a short talk with him

and ask for a blessing. When Rabbi Greenberg was one in 1991, his parents took him to the Rebbe to get the dollar before moving to Alaska. The Rebbe knew the family was going to Alaska. He gave him a second dollar to take to Alaska to give away. He saw potential in every person, even a child.

[10:59:58 AM](#)

RABBI YOSEF GREENBERG, Alaska Jewish Campus, supported SCR 15. He said about 35 years ago the governor then also proclaimed Education and Sharing Day. It is probably going to be a great blessing for the state to have this inspiration. The Rebbe has inspired thousands of rabbis to relocate. Rabbi Greenberg came to Alaska from New York with his wife 27 years ago because of the inspiration of Rebbe Menachem. The Rebbe inspired his son to return to Alaska and start the Jewish center in the Mat-Su Valley. If there are 7 billion people in world, that means that God thinks the world needs 7 billion candles. Taking out one candle darkens the entire world. The message of Education and Sharing Day is that each child has a path and mission and contribution. People cannot give up on one child, not one child can be left behind. Building the character of children is more important than being successful in a career. Statistics shows that children who come from good, happy homes and have a mission and direction are more successful. Then the taxpayer pays less to take care of people who need help. Happy children become contributors to society.

[11:03:01 AM](#)

MR. Y. GREENBERG said families with no direction become burdens on society It is much better to educate children to have that foundation in their system. He looks forward to being in Juneau March 21 to listen and receive the proclamation.

SENATOR HUGHES said March 27 is the date of the proclamation, but both rabbis are traveling to Juneau earlier because they won't be traveling during the Jewish holidays.

[11:04:19 AM](#)

MR. Y. GREENBERG said Rabbi Mendy will be doing the invocation the week before Education and Sharing Day, on Wednesday, March 21, 2018.

[11:05:00 AM](#)

MS. BUSHNELL said, to answer a previous question, seven presidents have proclaimed Education and Sharing Day: Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump.

[11:05:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS held SCR 15 in committee. He said he ordered a fiscal note and the expectation is that it will be zero.

[11:05:57 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 11:05 a.m.