

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 6, 2018

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kevin Meyer, Chair
Senator David Wilson
Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator John Coghill
Senator Dennis Egan

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 7

Dedicating the fourth floor Senate conference room of the Alaska State Capitol to the late Senate President Jan Faiks.

- MOVED SR 7 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 8

Proclaiming February 2018 as Black History Month.

- MOVED SR 8 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 5

Proclaiming March 2, 2018, as Alaska Reads Day.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SR 7

SHORT TITLE: DEDICATING THE JAN FAIKS CONFERENCE ROOM

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) GIESSEL

01/26/18	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/26/18	(S)	STA
02/06/18	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SR 8

SHORT TITLE: FEBRUARY 2018: BLACK HISTORY MONTH

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BEGICH

01/26/18 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/26/18 (S) STA
02/06/18 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SCR 5

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA READS DAY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GARDNER

02/24/17 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/24/17 (S) EDC, STA
04/03/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/03/17 (S) Heard & Held
04/03/17 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
04/12/17 (S) EDC RPT 3DP
04/12/17 (S) DP: HUGHES, BEGICH, COGHILL
04/12/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/12/17 (S) Moved SCR 5 Out of Committee
04/12/17 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
02/06/18 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

KARI NORE, Staff
Senator Giessel
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of SR 7.

SENATOR TOM BEGICH
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SR 8, provided an overview of the resolution.

SENATOR BERTA GARDNER
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SCR 5, provided an overview of the resolution.

JACOB TATUM, Staff
Senator Gardner
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of SCR 5.

ANNA NEIDIG, Member
Alaska Reading Coalition
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SCR 5.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:48 PM](#)

CHAIR KEVIN MEYER called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel, Wilson, Coghill, and Chair Meyer.

SR 7-DEDICATING THE JAN FAIKS CONFERENCE ROOM

[3:31:44 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER announced the consideration of Senate Resolution 7 (SR 7).

[3:31:59 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL, resolution sponsor, said her staff will provide an overview to the committee.

[3:32:14 PM](#)

KARI NORE, Staff, Senator Giessel, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided an overview of SR 7 as follows:

Senate Resolution 7 names the fourth floor Senate conference room after Jan Faiks in honor of her legacy in the Legislature and her service to the State of Alaska.

Senator Faiks was a pioneer for women in politics who made her mark on Alaska state history. She was the first woman in the history of the United States to be elected as a presiding officer of a state legislative body.

Senator Faiks was among a key group of legislators who helped create the Constitutional Budget Reserve Fund. She is credited with bringing polish to the Legislature by instituting a dress code and promoting other rules of decorum.

SENATOR GIESSEL added that she resided in Senator Faiks' district and knew the senator dating back to the 1970s. She remarked that Senator Faiks made some outstanding achievements in the Legislature.

CHAIR MEYER noted that Senator Faiks was a senator in the Alaska Legislature from [1983-1990].

SENATOR GIESSEL added that Senator Faiks was a teacher in her school district from 1968 to 1978, a time when she had known her.

[3:34:26 PM](#)

SENATOR EGAN joined the committee meeting.

[3:34:58 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER opened and closed public testimony.

SENATOR COGHILL shared that his father served with Senator Faiks and he always spoke highly of her. He noted that he had met Senator Faiks on occasion. He stated that his father did enjoy working with Senator Faiks and was pleased that she was the presiding officer, something that said a lot for Alaska that the state was the first to establish, "Having a woman take the gavel."

CHAIR MEYER noted that the resolution has a zero fiscal note.

[3:36:23 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report SR 7, version 30-LS0880\J from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note.

[3:36:36 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER announced that being no objection, the motion carried.

[3:36:48 PM](#)

At ease.

SR 8-FEBRUARY 2018: BLACK HISTORY MONTH

[3:38:17 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER called the committee back to order. He announced the consideration of Senate Resolution 8 (SR 8).

[3:38:48 PM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SR 8, said the resolution is like the resolution that was proposed the previous year and passed by the Senate. He explained that SR 8 simply declares February 2018 as "Black History Month." He noted differences from the previous year's resolution. He asserted that the history of African Americans in Alaska is a history that is part of the state's fabric.

He disclosed that in 1926 the United States initiated "Negro History Week" observance. In 1976, President Ford expanded the observance to "Black History Month" with the month of February chosen to recognize African American contributions in the nation's history. He noted that the February was chosen because it was the birth month of Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglas.

[3:40:41 PM](#)

He addressed the previous resolution and noted that he knew Senator Faiks and shared his history with the senator when she served in the Legislature.

[3:41:41 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER opened and closed public testimony.

[3:42:15 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report SR 8, version 30-LS1308\D from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note.

[3:42:37 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER announced that being no objection, the motion carried.

SCR 5-ALASKA READS DAY

[3:44:25 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER called the committee back to order. He announced the consideration of Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 (SCR 5).

[3:44:47 PM](#)

SENATOR BERTA GARDNER, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SCR 5, explained that the resolution would proclaim March 2, 2018 as "Alaska Reads Day." She provided an overview of SCR 5 as follows:

Early literacy has been a passion of mine for a long time, not only with an interest in education for the state, but also because I have two children who are

dyslexic in various degrees; I've had an awareness of it to find out my husband is dyslexic too. I've seen the difficulties that some kids have in learning to read and I've also seen the impacts it has on them in terms of self-esteem, struggles and things like that, and I've followed it. My kids have grown up, they are successful, independent, starting their own families now but I am very much aware of how different their stories might have been had they not had the support and resources from their school, from our family, and an understanding of what they were struggling with.

I've been to a lot of conferences and I tend to gravitate to the issues about education and about reading proficiencies. I've heard a lot of experts talk about social and economic consequences of reading difficulties or failure of people not being able to read proficiently, particularly by third grade. There is a national effort to talk about learning to read up to about third grade and then reading to learn after third grade. I was at one conference where a group of retired military generals, admirals and such presented, and they talked about the lack of reading proficiency being a national security issue, that they can't assume that all of their people can read well enough to follow instructions and understand manuals. So, they got involved in the movement to try to promote reading proficiency.

We have all heard the reports that the state is not strong in reading proficiency and that it is a chronic problem and we don't seem to have been able to address it effectively; that being said, I'm not a fan of resolutions, generally not a huge fan of task forces, although sometimes they are effective but I introduced this resolution at the request of a reading advocate and I assume you will hear from her. I am a fan of the multi-pronged approach to addressing some of these thorny, complex problems and there are a lot of elements to address it for part of it is awareness, part of it is early exposure. There are a lot of organizations that work, it's effective teachers, it's PTA programs, and there are lots of things that can happen to help.

This resolution is one small part to draw awareness to the issue, to be part of a national effort. There is a

national "Read Across America Day" which has developed a lot of resources to help promote it, libraries are involved, PTAs and such. I think one of the things I want to emphasize as much as I can is one way to engage kids and get them involved and interested in really wanting to do it is that it is fun, it's fun and it helps you be successful in almost any thing you start to do.

I remember the first book I was ever given that was my own, I came from a family of four kids and we had a lot of books but this one was my very own, it was a birthday present, I don't know if I was three or four, but it was, "The Cat in The Hat Comes Back," and I loved it dearly. I remember that Christmas when I was five my parents got us the Childcraft Encyclopedia and years later when mother persuaded us to move them along to other children, I kept my favorite volume and I still have it today and I read it to my grandkids; I think that is really how you engage kids in reading, it's great, great fun.

[3:49:44 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER explained that since the resolution was originally introduced the date has become problematic. She disclosed that she did not choose the date, but the date was chosen by a national program. She disclosed that it has come to her attention that Dr. Seuss, the beloved writer of children's books, was not the man many had hoped he would be, that there have been indications that he was very racist. She asserted that she was not fully committed to the resolution's observation date but added that being part of the national program that one agrees with would be nice. She emphasized that the resolution is not about honoring Dr. Seuss, but about encouraging kids, families and communities to help children succeed by starting with literacy.

SENATOR WILSON thanked Senator Gardner for addressing his concern that he mentioned to her earlier. He asked if Senator Gardner had an alternate date in mind.

SENATOR GARDNER replied that any date would work. She reiterated that SCR 5 is about the issue addressed in the resolution.

[3:51:19 PM](#)

JACOB TATUM, Staff, Senator Gardner, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, stated that SCR 5 would be an important step in

addressing substandard reading proficiency in Alaska. He set forth that the resolution intends to connect readers of all ages within the wide network of services, organizations, and advocates that have reading proficiency at the core of their mission. He detailed that SCR 5 would honor the birthday of Dr. Seuss on March 2, 2018, a day envisioned where Alaskan communities celebrate Alaska Reads Day to promote all things reading.

[3:55:14 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER opened public testimony.

[3:55:26 PM](#)

ANNA NEIDIG, Member, Alaska Reading Coalition, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SCR 5 as follows:

I am testifying in support as a member of the Alaska Reading Coalition, and as Vice President of the Alaska International Dyslexia Association.

I want to tell you the value of passing an "Alaska Reads Day" resolution. When I learned about this resolution, I did not realize it had not yet completed the full legislative process toward enactment. Under this misunderstanding, I reached out to my local library in excitement to schedule a collaborative event. Loussac Library staff heartily embraced the idea; they immediately saw it as a great opportunity to grow their already scheduled Dr. Seuss birthday celebration into a larger, more encompassing, outreach event.

On March 2, 2018, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss' birthday, the Loussac Library in Anchorage will be hosting three Dr. Seuss book readings in the Wilda Marston Theatre and has opened its newly renovated atrium to local outreach organizations. So simply the rumor of an "Alaska Reads Day" has already created an effective platform for collaborative community outreach to families at high risk of low reading proficiency. Public and private organizations are already rallying around "Alaska Reads Day."

Our collaborative event is geared to increasing exposure in language and other pre-reading skills that help children succeed. We will have fun activities for children, a checklist for identifying reading

struggles, and information about resources for struggling readers.

So, with great enthusiasm, despite a little legislative process misunderstanding, speaking on behalf of the Alaska Reading Coalition and the Alaska International Dyslexia Association, please pass SCR 5 because in our minds you already have.

[3:57:40 PM](#)

CHAIR MEYER closed public testimony.

SENATOR EGAN thanked Senator Gardner for introducing SCR 5. He recounted being a longtime advocate for reading in Alaska. He disclosed that his daughter volunteers as a director with Dolly Parton's [Imagination Library] that works with the state's Best Beginnings program.

CHAIR MEYER asked if the committee members had possible amendments.

[4:00:42 PM](#)

SENATOR WILSON explained that he was very supportive of SCR 5. He noted that he cosponsored the initiative for the Dyslexia Task Force and believed in Alaska's education. He disclosed that he was going to school to become a teacher and have a degree in education.

He offered a conceptual amendment to strike verbiage in the resolution that references Dr. Seuss and to keep the observation date of March 2, 2018. He asked that lines 29-31 on page 2 and line 1 on page 3 be stricken from the resolution and that the date be kept maintaining alignment with the activities that have already been planned.

CHAIR MEYER asked him to confirm that the conceptual amendment was to delete lines 29-31 on page 2 and line 1 on page 3.

SENATOR WILSON answered correct.

[4:00:55 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL objected for discussion purposes.

CHAIR MEYER asked Senator Gardner if she would like to address Senator Wilson's conceptual amendment.

SENATOR GARDNER replied that she appreciated the amendment and the spirit in which it is intended. She said she agreed with the amendment and thanked Senator Wilson for providing a resolution to the conflict.

CHAIR MEYER asked if there were additional objections or comments.

SENATOR COGHILL pointed out that Dr. Seuss was being removed from the resolution and asked why the amendment was being offered.

SENATOR WILSON explained that the amendment reflected the national attention debating Dr. Seuss's earlier characterizations and cartoons between 1920-1940. He asserted that he and some of his constituents harbor an issue with honoring Dr. Seuss due to controversies that have not been fully addressed.

[4:02:25 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL noted that he objected only because he thought Dr. Seuss's later work showed extreme tolerance for all kinds of people. He opined that Dr. Seuss's earlier work may not be the best way to judge him. He asserted that he has not heard what Senator Wilson was referencing regarding a national discussion on Dr. Seuss, especially if the entanglement was the kind in the politically-correct-zone rather than a real problem. He stated that he has been active in trying to help people read through the use of Dr. Seuss. He summarized that he was surprised and objected because he did not know the issue that Senator Wilson was talking about.

CHAIR MEYER asked Senator Gardner if she has heard of the same concerns that Senator Wilson has voiced.

SENATOR GARDNER explained that Senator Wilson brought the issue regarding Dr. Seuss to her attention and she spent time prior to the committee meeting to find another children's author of stature that could be substituted. She emphasized that her effort is to draw attention to reading. She opined that Dr. Seuss has certainly brought a great deal of pleasure to children and adults as well and that was probably why he was selected to be sort of the symbol of "Alaska Reads Day." She reiterated that whatever the committee wants to do is fine with her.

[4:04:30 PM](#)

SENATOR WILSON emphasized that he did not want his issue with Dr. Seuss to be a controversy that the Legislature must take up later should the public call the act into question. He asserted that his intent is to head-off the debate regarding Dr. Seuss.

SENATOR GIESSEL stated that she agreed with Senator Coghill. She noted that she stayed apprised of national topics and she has not heard of what Senator Wilson addressed, something that comes as a surprise to her as well.

CHAIR MEYER suggested that the committee needs to get a better understanding and clarification of Senator Wilson's concern. He admitted that he was not aware of the issue that Senator Wilson revealed. He asked that Senator Wilson provide the committee with additional information.

4:06:11 PM

CHAIR MEYER held SCR 5 in committee.

4:06:52 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Meyer adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee at 4:06 p.m.