

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 17, 2020

8:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Sara Hannan, Co-Chair  
Representative Matt Claman  
Representative Sharon Jackson (via teleconference)

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins  
Representative Steve Thompson  
Representative DeLena Johnson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN & POLICY RECOMMENDATION  
TO THE GOVERNOR

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MIKE LEVINE, Senior Arctic Fellow  
Ocean Conservancy  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered a presentation on the Climate  
Change Action Plan & Policy Recommendation to the Governor.

LUKE HOPKINS  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered a presentation on the Climate  
Change Action Plan & Policy Recommendation to the Governor.

SAM SCHIMMEL  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered a presentation on the Climate  
Change Action Plan & Policy Recommendation to the Governor.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:17 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Hannan, Claman, and Jackson (via teleconference) were present at the call to order.

### **PRESENTATION: Climate Change Action Plan & Policy Recommendation to the Governor**

[8:03:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on a climate change action plan and policy recommendations to the governor.

[8:03:41 AM](#)

MIKE LEVINE, Senior Arctic Fellow, Ocean Conservancy, said the scheduled speakers would talk about the Climate Action for Alaska Leadership Team (CAALT) - its process and product. He said he would begin by providing a background about the operation of the team; Luke Hopkins would talk about science and local governments; and Sam Schimmel would talk about the importance of action, impacts to Native communities, and the role of youth in the team process.

[8:04:33 AM](#)

MR. LEVINE acknowledged that the coronavirus was front and center in focus currently, and he thanked the committee for continuing its work on other important matters. He cited a report from the International Arctic Research Center (IARC) at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, which he read as follows:

Alaska has recently experienced profound environmental change related to extreme weather events and deviations from the historical climate. Sustained warmth, sea ice loss, coastal flooding, river flooding, and major ecosystem changes have impacted the daily lives of Alaskans around the state. Temperatures have been consistently warmer than any time in the past century, the growing season has increased substantially in most areas, and the snow cover season has shortened. Precipitation has

increased and, like temperature, the changes vary regionally. The ocean around Alaska is now regularly warmer than at any time in the past 150 years, affecting everything from algae to fisheries and human health.

MR. LEVINE next read from a letter from CAALT to Governor Mike Dunleavy, as follows:

The science is clear: Alaska communities, economies, and ecosystems are changing rapidly. Emissions from the combustion of fossil fuels are the root cause of these changes, and there is an urgent need to take action to address both the causes and effects. Alaska has both the opportunity and obligation to be a leader in the effort to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

MR. LEVINE continued to emphasize the science behind the claim that greenhouse gasses are the root cause of climate change, and he said this affects all aspects of life.

[8:06:54 AM](#)

MR. LEVINE said climate change is not a political issue. He said when former Governor Bill Walker created CAALT, he was "continuing a line of action set in motion by his predecessors." The team was created in 2017 via administrative order; several members were appointed by the governor. He noted that those members are listed on pages 2 and 3 of the policy recommendation documents, entitled "Alaska Climate Change Policy Recommendations to the Governor" [included in the committee packet]. Members were appointed for three-year terms, and the lieutenant governor was the chair of the leadership team. Members came from diverse backgrounds and occupations. Mr. Levine talked about the meetings and the advisory bodies and working groups created.

[8:09:19 AM](#)

MR. LEVINE said the team was charged with drafting a climate policy for Alaska and an action for implementing it; some actions would be best taken through the administration, while others would be suited to follow the legislative process. The ultimate goal was to have a policy adopted by the legislature akin to the Alaska Arctic Policy.

MR. LEVINE, referring again to the aforementioned policy document, highlighted segments of the vision statement on page 5. He said it sought to: promote social, ecological, cultural, and economic well-being [of communities]; help achieve food security, energy security, and environmental security; ensure healthy ecosystems and prudent natural resource management; and sustain a robust economy based on Alaskan innovation and resilience. He explained that the idea was to show that Alaska can take meaningful action to mitigate and adapt to climate change while recognizing it is a resource-dependent state.

MR. LEVINE drew attention to the statement of purpose on page 6. He highlighted that Alaska's economy is currently dependent on natural resource development, including oil and natural gas production. Although these resources are finite and contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, they also support essential government services and the state's "ability to adapt and respond." He said responsible development of those resources, at least in the short term, was not inconsistent with the policy statement or actions proposed.

MR. LEVINE named the six broad policy statements related to climate change, which are shown on page 8: communities and partnerships; human and ecosystem health; economic opportunity; clean energy; outreach and education; and investment. Each of those statements relates to objectives for the state to implement. He emphasized that the policy document illustrated a broad consensus among the leadership team.

[8:12:34 AM](#)

MR. LEVINE talked about a draft action plan, which he called "a road map for implementing the policy." The draft action plan is a list of suggested action related to the six policy statements and their accompanying suggested actions. He said it is a manual, and the team hoped it could work with the governor to prioritize and implement the recommendations. He said "these documents" were transmitted to the governor in December 2018, along with a list of short-term actions in a cover letter. The cover letter included recommendations for three immediate term steps: to appoint a permanent cabinet-level position focused on climate change; to commit to developing and promoting legislation that would codify the climate action policy and require steps to implement it; and to recognize that climate communications outreach and public education are essential. Mr. Levine said at the same time the parallel cabinet climate team

developed a list of short-term actions that could be implemented, which was also provided to the governor.

MR. LEVINE said once the initial documents were submitted to the governor, the leadership team began thinking about the work of prioritizing the proposed actions. He quoted the opening statement of the policy as follows:

We do not view these documents as the conclusion of our work; rather we hope to have created a platform from which the administration and future administrations can move forward to implement the climate policy and provide the needed personnel and support to take action pursuant to that policy. We stand ready to assist the state in taking action, as needed, to ensure sustainable communities; vibrant, diverse economies; and healthy ecosystems for all Alaskans and future generations.

MR. LEVINE stated that unfortunately the team never got the chance, because shortly after taking office, Governor Dunleavy revoked the administrative order that had created the team, thus ending the work of CAALT.

[8:14:45 AM](#)

LUKE HOPKINS said he was former mayor of Fairbanks North Star Borough and served on former Governor Sarah Palin's subcabinet climate team. He talked about the meetings held by CAALT, which included three sessions to take public comment. He echoed Mr. Levine's remarks about the importance of diverse representation on the team. He said the team requested that the governor form a science advisory group and an oil and gas advisory group, both of which gave validity to discussion and the team's publications.

[8:19:39 AM](#)

MR. HOPKINS expressed frustration regarding the present state of climate policy considering the history of climate change efforts made over the last 30 years. The goals and objectives have been clearly stated.

MR. HOPKINS talked about his property, with permafrost, and his care taken to not walk on certain areas to protect vegetation. He stressed that climate change is affecting the state in many ways, and he expressed his hope that the state would take action

through the policy recommendations instead of hiding information from the public, which he indicated has occurred in the past.

[8:23:46 AM](#)

MR. HOPKINS offered his understanding that former Governor Palin had requested a capital appropriation of \$10 million, which was approved by the legislature, and the final expenditure of those funds was in 2016; therefore, there was financial support for the work on climate change for almost a decade. Mr. Hopkins emphasized that money is needed to continue the work. Local governments are spending money and making efforts. He warned against a continual restart of state policy regarding climate change. He said, "We are leading ourselves down a path of start and stop that is not helpful for our state residents and our state government."

[8:26:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed appreciation for Mr. Hopkins' review of the 30 years' record. She noted that the documents from the current meeting are not hidden from the public; they are available on the legislature's website.

[8:27:00 AM](#)

SAM SCHIMMEL informed the committee that he is Kenaitze Indian and Siberian Yupik Eskimo and was a former member of CAALT. He currently serves on the Climate Action Technical Committee for the National Foundation for American Indians. He said he would speak about what climate action means for Native and rural Alaska, as well as the role of youth in bringing forth the current recommendations.

MR. SCHIMMEL said people hear about what climate change means, but rarely about what it feels like. He shared that part of his youth was spent in Gambell, Alaska, in the Bering Strait, in a community of about 800 people, primarily Alaska Native. With limited groceries at exorbitant prices, the lifestyle there was largely one of subsistence. He talked about going out whaling as a boy and visiting his great uncle, "the traditional weatherman," who would determine which direction to go to find the animals. Climate change created unpredictable weather patterns that made it impossible for him to make these determinations towards his final years in life. Mr. Schimmel said, "What that meant was that our traditional knowledge was no longer holding the role that it once did, and we could no longer

rely on it." Although this year the community was lucky to have a large enough ice pack, in prior years there has not been enough ice, which means that the walrus on which the Native people rely cannot be harvested. As a result, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has had to fly in canned salmon to support the diets of the people of Gambell. He stated, "Our grocery store - the Bering Sea - is changing." He emphasized that in order for Native communities like his to exist, there must be climate mitigation and adaptation.

8:31:08 AM

MR. SCHIMMEL said CAALT worked to ensure that the Native way of being was not impacted by its recommendations and traditional methods of hunting and gathering were supported "by building in mechanisms to allow these practices to continue." He said a larger sea, because of a lack of ice, makes hunting dangerous. Figuring out ways to allow for different times of harvest was a factor in the recommendations of CAALT - "the integration of traditional ecological knowledge with scientific background to create ... a cohesive climate policy and policy recommendations regarding ... all aspects of these types of actions." He said the hope is that "our communities" can continue to carry on as they have for thousands of years in the face of climate change. He indicated that that is where the recommendations that have been given to the committee come into play.

MR. SCHIMMEL highlighted the role of youth in giving feedback for the recommendations. At one point, over 40 youth gathered in Anchorage to give their input. He emphasized the importance of a policy plan put together by people of diverse backgrounds.

8:34:30 AM

MR. SCHIMMEL stressed the importance of perpetuating "life that has been taking place in Alaska" without "negatively impacting the economic outlook of the state," adapting to climate change without "changing how we continue to do business," and "finding a meaningful solution in that space." He thanked the committee for taking the time to address this issue. He advised that while a lot of other things are going on in the world, climate change is "one thing that won't be going away." He said adaptive measures will need to be taken in order for his people to continue living in Gambell. He thanked committee members for putting their minds together "to make a better Alaska, and to make an easier Alaska, for Alaska Natives and everybody else."

[8:36:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked the presenters.

[8:36:15 AM](#)

MR. SCHIMMEL, in response to Co-Chair Hannan, talked about the current situation related to the coronavirus pandemic and his place at Stanford University, and he said he was currently attempting to return to Alaska before the bay area in California entered into its shelter in place phase.

[8:37:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HANNAN talked about the focus of the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee on community issues of the state, and how the focus on climate change has been affected by the current escalation of concern regarding COVID-19. She expressed appreciation for Mr. Schimmel's work on CAALT, while speculating that there probably would be no money in the budget to spend on the climate change recommendations during the pandemic.

[8:40:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND said she was aware that while people were being told to wash their hands, there were dozens of communities without running water. She said, as Mr. Hopkins had pointed out, that there have been known issues for the last 30 years, and she opined that "with the background of climate change, we should have been able to bring our communities up to speed." Now, she said, people are being asked to shelter in place.

[8:41:27 AM](#)

MR. LEVINE, in response to Co-Chair Hannan's previous remarks, said one of the comments heard in discussions by the leadership team, as well as in public comments, was regarding "the overlapping nature of climate change." As Mr. Schimmel said, food security and economic opportunity overlap with the environment in communities and with cultures; they are not separate issues. He indicated that COVID-19 is also intertwined.

MR. LEVINE, in his concluding remarks, noted that his son, who is eight, is a fourth generation Alaskan. He stated his belief that "we all have an obligation" to ensure future generations

have the same opportunities in Alaska that former generations had. Mr. Levine said he understands that everyone may not agree as to the best course of action, but efforts to figure it out must continue. He said that is what made CAALT successful: the ability to see its differences and work toward a common goal. He said he and the other two speakers encourage legislators "to continue to lead those difficult conversations and to engage Alaskans in all of them."

[8:43:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked the presenters again.

[8:44:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HANNAN noted that printed copies of the team's recommendations were available. She emphasized the importance of keeping the focus on the issue.

[8:45:26 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:45 a.m.