

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

March 7, 2019

8:12 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon, Vice Chair
Representative John Lincoln
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Dave Talerico
Representative Sarah Vance

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Dan Ortiz

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Andi Story

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

WELCOME: AUKE KWAAN AND TAKU KWAAN

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA NATIVE GOVERNANCE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN MORRIS, Tribal Member
Taku Kwaan
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Welcomed the committee on behalf of Taku Kwaan.

MARIE OLSEN, Tribal Member
Auke Kwaan
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Welcomed the committee on behalf of Auke Kwaan.

ANDREA SANDERS, Director
First Alaskans Institute
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on Alaska Native Governance.

ROSITA WORL, President
Sealaska Heritage Institute
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on Alaska Native Governance.

RICHARD PETERSON, President
Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
("Tlingit & Haida")
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on Alaska Native Governance.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:12:45 AM](#)

CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY called the inaugural House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:12 a.m. Representatives Talerico, Kopp, Lincoln, Vance, Edgmon, and Zulkosky were present at the call to order. Also present was Representative Story.

WELCOME: Auke Kwaan and Taku Kwaan

[8:13:45 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the first order of business would be a welcome of Auke Kwaan and Taku Kwaan.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY acknowledged the traditional territories of the Tlingit people, Auke Kwaan and Taku Kwaan. She welcomed forward John Morris from Taku Kwaan and Marie Olsen from Auke Kwaan. She thanked them both for their presence at the meeting and invited them to speak.

[8:14:55 AM](#)

JOHN MORRIS, Tribal Member, Taku Kwaan, introduced himself and stated that he is a member of the Douglas Indian Association of

the Taku Kwaan Native people that have occupied the Juneau-Douglas area for many years.

[8:15:31 AM](#)

MARIE OLSEN, Tribal Member, Auke Kwaan, opened her statement in Tlingit. She shared her excitement for "this most historical occasion for all of the indigenous people in the United States of America." She stated that she is from this area and is Auke Kwaan, "the people from this area." She said, "I would love to welcome all of you to my area, to my land. I welcome you. I hope that all of you do the job that is beholden on you, because you have been elected. You have been elected by your people in the State of Alaska." Ms. Olsen made a statement in Tlingit and said, "I thank you very much - because I recognize the history of what is occurring now. Gunalcheesh."

[8:18:03 AM](#)

MR. MORRIS echoed Ms. Olsen's statement and welcomed the committee. He shared his excitement about the state's desire to work with all 229 of Alaska's tribes. Mr. Morris stated that there are 18 tribes in southeast and that they value their water, hunting, and fishing rights. He expressed concern about the tribe's fragile king salmon fishery and contaminated beaches. Mr. Morris stated that his tribe has been sampling sediment, testing water quality on the Taku river, and collaborating with the Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission. Mr. Morris, on behalf of himself and his tribe, expressed concern about the viability of their way of life and inter-generational culture. Mr. Morris shared his excitement to see the state's inclusion of tribes in the legislative process and ended his statement with, "Gunalcheesh."

[8:19:37 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY thanked Ms. Olsen and Mr. Morris. She stated, "Quyana, gunalcheesh. ... Your words welcoming us to your traditional territories are respected and have been heard by this committee."

PRESENTATION(S): Alaska Native Governance

[8:19:55 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the final order of business would be the presentation on Alaska Native Governance.

8:20:20 AM

ANDREA SANDERS opened her statement in the Yupik language and shared that she comes from Mamterilleq, also known as Bethel, while her ancestors and family come from Kwinhagak. She stated that she serves as the Director of the Alaska Native Policy Center, an initiative at First Alaskans Institute. She echoed the words of the elders to speak before her and stated that it is an honor to see the members serve on this committee. She stated that there are many ancestors, native leaders, and native advocates who have been waiting for this historic moment. She said that Alaska is a new state but that tribes are not new to the lands. She thanked Barbara 'Waaahlaal Gidaak Blake and Meghan Topkok for contributing to the presentation and expressed gratitude to the people of the Auke Kwaan and Taku Kwaan for allowing this group to convene on their ancestral lands.

8:22:30 AM

MS. SANDERS began her PowerPoint presentation and shared that the vision of First Alaskans Institute is "progress for the next ten thousand years." She stated that the organization covers a breadth of topics and that the organization has a commitment to ensure that Alaska Native people maintain their well-being and a connection to Alaska for another ten thousand years. Ms. Sanders explained the reference to "thousands of years" is not anecdotal; carbon testing from archeological digs in Kwinhagak have provided scientific evidence that her ancestors have been present in Alaska for thousands of years. This has spurred a cultural renaissance; youth have found artifacts, heard stories, and brought Yupik dancing back to the community. She shared that youth were hungry for a means of cultural expression; she attributed this interest to the "power of knowing who we are and ... no longer being invisible in the narrative of Alaska." Ms. Sanders stated that similar work is happening in Kodiak where people are beginning to learn more about their history.

MS. SANDERS stated that her presentation is meant to enhance knowledge of history and contemporary issues. She sought to help decisionmakers better understand their responsibilities and the opportunities to strengthen relationships with the Alaska Native community.

MS. SANDERS emphasized the importance that all Alaskans understand that Alaska Native communities possess a knowledge system and connection to place and land. Ms. Sanders referred

to this as "geographic intelligence" and noted that others may refer to it as "traditional ecological knowledge." Ms. Sanders stated that Alaska Native communities have intact knowledge of the environment, relationships with other species, and the changes underway and ideas for how to move forward.

MS. SANDERS described the variety of distinct cultural groups, languages, and ways of life among Alaska Native people. She stated that the groups were traditionally independent nations; the Haida, Yupik, Athabascan, Inupiaq, Alutiiq are connected but distinct with their own languages, creation stories, and methods of harvesting food. Ms. Sanders imparted the importance of understanding that Alaska Native groups are not a monolithic people and that there is often a high burden placed upon the Alaska Native community to have one voice or one position. She stated that these groups are diverse and distinct and the pressure to have one position can be an unfair burden; the groups have independent economic, cultural, and educational needs. Ms. Sanders pressed the committee to be responsive to and understand the diversity of needs across Alaska Native communities.

[8:27:20 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS shared the importance in acknowledging the operation of three sovereign governments: the tribal, federal, and state government. She stated that there has been a missed opportunity in partnership between these sovereign governments and shared her hope that, in collaboration, new solutions can come forward.

MS. SANDERS stated that tribal governments play the role of local governments for villages and tribes. She elaborated on her personal experience as a tribal member of the Kwinhagok tribe and shared that the tribe supports tribal members while operating with a small budget and little land. Ms. Sanders stated that there are instances where tribes have purchased or acquired land, but that separation of tribes from their ancestral land has been a concern. In reference to her presentation, Ms. Sanders stated that every [political] district in Alaska has a correlating tribe; "there is no pocket of our state that goes untouched."

MS. SANDERS stated that tribes exercise self-governance and self-determination, which she defined as the ability to make decisions affecting the individual lives of tribal members. She relayed that Congress extended the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) to Alaska in 1936; IRA governments were subsequently

organized in villages and, where not established, traditional governments operated in the form of village councils. Ms. Sanders encouraged the committee members to communicate with village IRA governments or traditional governments to learn about their priorities and any partnerships with the city, municipality, borough, or the regional village corporation.

[8:31:40 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS acknowledged Roy S. Ewan and Paul John as past leaders and stated that they have left a legacy that "allows us to know who we are. We know who are; we are people with traditional values and knowledge on how to govern in modern contexts." In reference to slide eight, Ms. Sanders stated that there are more than twenty unique cultural groups and languages. Ms. Sanders noted that some of the terminology may be outdated, but the graph accurately illustrates relationships between Alaska's cultural groups. She stated that Alaska Natives comprise 19.5 percent of the state's population, although that percentage can sometimes be as low as 15 percent. Ms. Sanders noted that Alaska Natives are one of the fastest growing populations but often a difficult population to enumerate as individuals may live in overcrowded homes, are multi-racial, or may be difficult to reach. In reference to a map illustrating the Native languages of Alaska recognized as official state languages, she stated that traditional boundaries and territories generally fall along linguistic lines. She referred to recent efforts to keep the languages alive, stating that "they are a connection to who we are." Ms. Sanders implored all Alaskans to learn a greeting in an Alaska Native language.

[8:35:10 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS sought to clarify that the term "government-to-government relationship," as heard in federal government settings, refers to a relationship based on the political status, rather than racial status, of American Indian and Alaska Native people. Ms. Sanders stated that political and racial status can be conflated; people may not understand the political status that Alaska Native people hold and may get confused or angered by the state's provision of free services, such as healthcare. Ms. Sanders referenced that, upon the founding of the country and in recognition of what tribes gave up, founders made a commitment to serve as trustees, provide healthcare, and sustain the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native people. Ms. Sanders explained that this relationship is founded on treaties and existing law and statute; it is a political

relationship. As a racial minority there are other civil rights protections that Alaska Native people are classified under, which is distinct from protections imbued from political status.

MS. SANDERS discussed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, which established the ANCSA corporations - entities that are innovators, leaders, and economic drivers in the state. In reference to a map showing the 12 regional geographic corporations superimposed on a map of the languages, Ms. Sanders pointed out that the map is somewhat misleading; actual ownership of ANCSA corporations can appear more as a "checkerboard," with state and federal land mixed in with ANCSA land.

MS. SANDERS gave a high-level overview of the types and number of Alaska Native organizations. She described how the regional Native non-profit associations/consortiums hold tribal delegated authority; the tribes delegate authority to the tribal non-profits in order to contract directly with the federal government.

MS. SANDERS further explained the tribes' inherent sovereignty that predates the U.S. Constitution, a government-to-government relationship with the federal government. In 2016 or 2017 the State of Alaska issued an attorney general's memo outlining the state's formalized relationship with tribes. Corporations, such as ANCSA, are a construct of state law and are intended to provide dividends to shareholders.

[8:41:21 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS noted the complexity of navigating the layers of tribal governments, municipal or borough governments, village corporations, school districts, state government, and the federal government. She stated that the resulting system requires that people find ways to navigate problems and innovate solutions. Ms. Sanders shared that the First Alaskans Institute encourages tribes and corporations to spend time with one another and address regional issues together. She noted that high-functioning partnerships are an important part of maintaining self-governance. Ms. Sanders stated that it is important to understand the relationship between tribes and governments; while they are distinct, some have memorandums of agreement and cooperatives and collaborate well together. As an example of a successful partnership, Ms. Sanders described villages getting a new dock, an addition to a school, and the

rebuilding of roads as the product of strong collaboration and partnerships.

[8:44:26 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS shared a quote by Jonathon Solomon of Fort Yukon beginning, "I share what's on my table with you." Ms. Sanders explained that subsistence is an economic term and that this perspective, in effect, casts Alaska Natives as a "special interest or user group." The way of life characterized by Jonathan Solomon and by elders' stories reflects a sustainable existence with the land as caretakers and in relationship with other species. Ms. Sanders continued to describe a relationship between Alaska Native communities and the land as a mutualism that transcends an economic descriptor. She stated, "...[it] is not simply putting food into your mouth - it is a way of life. It is our education system, it is our well-being, it is the way that we live in relationship with our environment. It is our spirituality; being on the land is like going to church for us. ... When we talk about subsistence, it is actually a very limited, narrow understanding of the importance of our way of life." She shared that First Alaskans Institute has shifted toward the use of the phrase, "our ways of life," as an alternative.

MS. SANDERS stated that Alaska Native communities have stewarded the land for thousands of years through their way of life and a "rigorous stewardship system." She said that this may include ceremony, protocols, societal laws, customs, practices, and - most importantly - the culture's value system. She referred to this as She shared that this value system continues to exist and has been operationalized for a modern context. Ms. Sanders shared her belief that all Alaskans can partake in and learn from the value system of Alaska Natives; as individuals build relationships and gain exposure they can acquire and incorporate values from Alaska Native cultures.

MS. SANDERS stated that federal and state wildlife laws have "a resource shortage use priority." She said this has been a contentious issue for a while, especially the differing interpretation and regulation of "rural resident priority" under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and under state law.

MS. SANDERS discussed the opportunity for partnership between the three sovereign entities. She said through self-determination and self-governance, also referred to as

compacting and contracting, there's opportunity for collaboration. As an example, Ms. Sanders pointed to Alaska's tribal health system, which has assumed control for tribal health from the Indian Health Service; data has shown dramatic increases in quality of life measures, such as life expectancy and immunization rates. Ms. Sanders shared that Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) is often looked to as a model, nationally and internationally, for the value that it places on respecting Native Alaskans' self-determination, self-governance, and cultural understandings of being and wellness. She stated that ANTHC could serve as a model for other systems.

[8:50:32 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS discussed the need for partnership between federal, state, and tribal governments and the strength gained through collaboration. She suggested that, rather than imagine these entities as fractions of a whole, they should be considered as functioning separately and collaboratively. She shared her personal belief that securing a voice in the state legislature will ensure a bright future for tribal communities.

[8:51:41 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS stated, in reference to the presentation, that youth are "hungry to know who they are." She shared that people are "waking up to what is possible" in terms of the integration of cultural values, an understanding of place, and geographic intelligence into the formal educational system. Ms. Sanders stated that this might mean "not learning about western expansion. ... That's not reflective of my history, that's not reflective of my place." Ms. Sanders opined that the sooner the education system reflects the history of Alaska Natives the sooner outcomes will improve.

[8:52:37 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS placed emphasis on valuing relationships, building trust, showing respect, and recognizing Alaska Native culture. She implored the members not to visit communities for just half a day, but to spend time with tribes. She shared that Ted Steven's legacy includes his visits to villages that often lasted four or five days. She said, "[People] may not remember all of his policy actions, but they remember him as a person." She shared that listening to the voices of the youth and elders is important to understanding the needs and concerns of a community. She shared the significance of relationships between

youth and elders and invited the members to attend the First Alaskans Institute's Elders and Youth Conference.

8:55:00 AM

MS. SANDERS encouraged the committee to be "transformational" rather than "transactional" and emphasized creating long-term strategies. She shared her hope for a shift in the mindset of partnerships, which she believes would bring a whole new perspective to, not only the fiscal situation, but the future of Alaska. Ms. Sanders referred to slide 17 with "thank you" written in every known Alaska Native language as a demonstration of appreciation, comradery, and friendship that the First Alaskans Institute seeks to foster with the committee and the committee members.

8:57:19 AM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that "our cultures have a lot to learn from each other." She asked Ms. Sanders to describe some of the values that Ms. Sanders feels have not been historically recognized.

8:57:50 AM

MS. SANDERS stated that "respect" is the first value that comes to mind. She shared that, as a Native person, she often feels a blatant disrespect and that the true history of Alaska Native tribes is disregarded. Frequently used narratives of the state, such as "north to the future" or "the last frontier," are problematic to Alaska Native tribes. Ms. Sanders stated that receiving these narratives and the exclusion of indigenous people from Alaska's constitution, coupled with language about pioneers, is hurtful. She stated that the establishment of the Special Committee on Tribal Affairs opens the door to fostering a respectful relationship. She stated, as another example, that the robust system of reciprocity as a way of life may be hard to quantify economically. She shared that the state government's management of resources, such as maximum sustained yield, are in opposition to these principles of reciprocity.

9:00:28 AM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that she sees and recognizes that the Alaska Native people have not felt respected and that this lack of respect is portrayed in the Alaska constitution. Representative Vance asked Ms. Sanders for forgiveness for not

honoring the people that were in Alaska before statehood and before the U.S. Constitution and for the trespass that was committed upon Alaska's lands. She asked for forgiveness, as a representative of the Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature. Representative Vance stated that the members will show respect and honor to all of the Alaska Native people in moving forward as a special committee and in other action taken by the legislature.

MS. SANDERS thanked Representative Vance. She stated that many families are multi-cultural and multi-racial, and even within Alaska Native communities, people are figuring out how to navigate a complicated history. Ms. Sanders stated that hearing Representative Vance's acknowledgement of disrespect towards Alaska Native people lifts a burden off the shoulders of the collective.

[9:02:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LINCOLN said that Ms. Sander's presentation was very comprehensive and that it elicited quite a few memories. In reference to Senator Stevens' visiting villages, Representative Lincoln referenced visits to remote communities made by Representative Vance's father. Representative Lincoln thanked Representative Vance for her comments.

[9:03:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP thanked Ms. Sanders for her presentation and her narrative of Alaska's history. He shared that he found Ms. Sander's discussion of cultural knowledge systems formed through relationship, community, and connection to place as transcending quantifiable relationships to be a refreshing and resonating perspective. Representative Kopp stated, "Alaska is awakening from a long night," in reference to a history of groups that did not understand one another, grow together, or form community. In reference to state and tribal collaboration, Representative Kopp stated that he looks forward to a new era of partnering, working in community, and functioning as a collective.

[9:04:57 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY thanked the committee members for their questions and comments and welcomed the next speaker.

[9:05:22 AM](#)

ROSITA WORL, President, Sealaska Heritage Institute, stated that her Tlingit names are Yeidiklats'okw and Kaahani, that she is an Eagle from the Thunderbird Clan, of the House Lowered from the Sun of Klukwan, and a Child of the Sockeye Clan. She thanked Chair Zulkosky and the members of the committee for the creation of the Special Committee on Tribal Affairs.

MS. WORL described her background as an anthropologist and her conduction of research throughout Alaska during the last 40 years, 10 years of which were spent in the Alaska Arctic. She mentioned that she enjoys anthropological research in Alaska due to the abundance of interesting cultures that have yet to be researched. She noted that she studied the North Slope and political development, and she wrote the first environmental impact statement on offshore development, which addressed the social/cultural impacts of oil development on indigenous communities. She said that she practices applied research and is involved with policy research. Ms. Worl noted that she served on the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Board of Directors for 17 years and served as co-chair of the Subsistence Committee and has recently been asked to serve on the AFN Subsistence Committee again.

MS. WORL described the breadth of AFN and stated that it is the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska and represents more than 140,000 Native peoples, or one out of every five Alaskans. AFN's membership includes 191 federally recognized tribes, 171 for-profit village corporations, 12 regional for-profit corporations, 12 regional not-for-profit organizations, and several tribal consortia that contract and compact to run federal and state programs. She stated that AFN is the oldest statewide Native corporation in the state. Ms. Worl stated that the federal government settled Alaska Native Aboriginal land claims differently than it settled land claims of American Indians. Early leaders understood the opportunity before the 12 regional non-profit associations and unified their efforts through AFN to achieve a fair settlement. She noted that this was a unique settlement compared to those of other native tribes in that AFN sought reparations rather than the establishment of reservations. Ms. Worl stated that, in seeking control over their land and resources, early leaders were making initial efforts towards economic self-determination. Those leaders were instrumental in enacting ANCSA and, following this, AFN evolved into the principle forum for Alaska Natives to address public policy issues in government.

[9:11:01 AM](#)

MS. WORL stated that AFN's mission is to advance and enhance the voice of Alaska Native communities on national and state policy matters such as civil rights, economic rights, development opportunities, voting rights, food security, traditional subsistence rights, and the right of tribal self-determination. She said AFN's internal organization reflects a unique political history: it is governed by a 38-member Board of Directors, with elected and appointed officials serving from each of the 12 ANCSA geographic regions; the other two members are elected by the voting delegates to serve two-year terms as co-chairs. The AFN Convention serves as the annual board meeting, which establishes priorities through the resolution process.

MS. WORL stated that, for thousands of years, Alaska Native peoples have survived and thrived in what visitors refer to as "the harshest environmental conditions on the planet," while to Alaska Native peoples it is their ancient homeland. Ms. Worl shared that as fueled by cultural values, ancient practices, traditional knowledge, and deep attachment to the land, Alaska Native peoples have an intimate knowledge of the environment. Regional and village for-profit Native corporations and not-for-profit Native corporations are economic and social drivers within their respective regions and generate multi-millions of dollars in state funds and investments. There is a keen awareness that Alaska is at a financial crossroads; the state is facing a budget deficit and Governor Mike Dunleavy's proposed cuts would have a dramatic impact upon all Alaskans, but particularly those in rural areas. It would be mutually beneficial for the state to consult and collaborate with Native and tribal groups to diminish what could be "devastating impacts" to current and future populations.

[9:14:57 AM](#)

MS. WORL shared that Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) is a small entity compared with other statewide tribal organizations and that, despite this, SHI has generated and expanded upon limited resources through partnerships with school districts and the University of Alaska. She stated that SHI has 85 employees who earned \$4 million dollars in income, spent \$7.1 million in Juneau, generated more than \$170,000 in sales and bed taxes, utilized over 200 Juneau vendors for purchases, and paid more than \$800,000 to 60 contractors for services related to SHI programs. Ms. Worl noted that the integration of language and culture into academic institutions improves academic standing of Native students. Ms. Worl provided metrics of SHI's impact upon

the Juneau and Alaska economy and expressed admiration for this small, though formidable, private nonprofit that was founded to enhance Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures in Southeast Alaska.

MS. WORL shared that, while she was the Native & Rural Specialist in Governor Steve Cowper's Office, she studied the impact of federal funds allocated to Alaska Natives because of their political status, which amounted to \$400 million annually. The group also passed a policy that recognized the special status of Native tribes. The policy was formalized into action by Governor Tony Knowles, but subsequently rescinded by the proceeding Governor. She stated that the amount of federal funds flowing into the state has significantly increased in the last 33 years. Relationships between tribes and the state have also significantly improved, a partial product of the state's recognition of the legitimacy of tribes.

MS. WORL restated that partnerships between school districts and the university system increase efficiency, funding, and the quality of services for tribal communities. She recommended that the State of Alaska consider the adoption of policies, similar to that of the federal government, that require consultation between the state government and Alaska Native tribes and corporations. Ms. Worl further recommended that the State of Alaska formalize collaboration with tribes and ANCs, as modeled after the New Mexico State-Tribal Collaboration Act. She relayed that such a policy would promote: communication and collaboration between state agency, Indian tribes, and ANCs; positive government-to-government relationships between the state and Indian entities; and cultural competency in providing services to Native Alaskans.

[9:23:03 AM](#)

MS. WORL relayed an AFN initiative to support the growth of a military presence in Alaska, which she believes holds promise for Alaska Natives as well as the state. She stated that AFN recently met with military officials in Washington, D.C., and discussed possible collaborations with the military. She said AFN supports a military presence in Alaska, but rather than repeat mistakes made during the first excursion of the military entering Alaska, which ignored the presence of Native people, AFN would like to promote collaboration.

[9:25:35 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY thanked Ms. Worl for her remarks and her history of work on behalf of Alaskans. Chair Zulkosky invited the next speaker to begin his presentation.

[9:26:23 AM](#)

RICHARD PETERSON, President, Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska ("Tlingit & Haida"), introduced himself and shared that he is Kaagwaantaan from the Eagle's Nest house. He expressed his gratitude to Chair Zulkosky, Vice-Chair Edgmon, and the committee for this long-overdue convening.

MR. PETERSON shared that Tlingit & Haida is the oldest tribe in Alaska; the tribal assembly will hold their eighty-fourth convening this April. Tlingit & Haida is the only regional tribe in Alaska, representing nearly 32,000 tribal citizens worldwide, with almost 7,000 residing in Juneau; there are also large constituencies in Anchorage and the railbelt. He stated that the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) were born out of a lawsuit; the two entities had been opposing land claims before the ANCSA settlement.

[9:28:19 AM](#)

MR. PETERSON paused his statement and offered an apology for not recognizing earlier the lands that the committee is meeting upon, the Auke Kwaan and Taku Kwaan, and the elders that are present. He noted their fortune to have esteemed elders, like Marie Olsen and John Morris, in the audience.

[9:28:51 AM](#)

MR. PETERSON stated that Tlingit & Haida has conducted government-to-government relations for nearly 84 years with quite a few programs in operation, such as Head Start. He stated that the tribe has a \$25,000,000 recurring budget, which fluctuates depending on grants. He discussed the economic sovereignty of the tribe and the establishment of for-profit businesses. He shared that there are quite a few businesses in Juneau that employ predominately, but not exclusively, tribal citizens.

MR. PETERSON stated that economic sovereignty is important of maintaining sustainability for the tribe's programs. The tribe's focus is on the social, economic, physical well-being of tribal citizens; this influences the programs that the tribe operates, focusing on seniors, youth, and hard-to-serve clients,

such as those that are homeless or about to be homeless. Mr. Peterson stated that the governor's proposed budget, which would slash programs such as Head Start, causes concern. Mr. Peterson revisited the earlier discussion of values and shared that the tribes' values center around their youth and elders, two populations that appear to be the hardest hit by the proposed budget. He shared that the sudden increase in living expenses imposed upon high-need elders at the Pioneer Home is not sustainable. He re-emphasized his concern about the proposed budget and the possible consequences of its passage.

[9:32:34 AM](#)

MR. PETERSON stated that the State of Alaska has yet to truly recognize the tribe's sovereignty but, in asking the tribes to waive their sovereignty, the state implicitly recognizes their existence and sovereignty. He reiterated his gratitude for the formation of the committee and urged its members to address some of the issues he's discussed. Returning to an earlier discussion of values, Mr. Peterson added "trust," and he stated that it is "hard to trust a group that says we don't exist." He stated that the formation of this committee is the first step in the formation of trust. He expressed his hope to see a similar type of committee form permanently in the Senate and in the Office of the Governor.

[9:34:39 AM](#)

MR. PETERSON shared that he considers the proposed budget "an attack on values" and noted it seems particularly targeted to affect rural and tribal citizens of Alaska. He shared his hope that the Special Committee on Tribal Affairs develop solutions in collaboration with tribes, and he implored the committee to consider how it can bring tribes into the discussion. He relayed that SHI and Tlingit & Haida hosted the Native Issues Forum the day prior, where Lieutenant Governor Kevin Meyer used the analogy of ornaments on a Christmas tree to describe the elimination of funding for services deemed inessential. Mr. Peterson expressed his disagreement and noted the misalignment of this analogy with the role of Alaska Native tribes in the provision and stewardship of resources. Mr. Richards shared his belief that Alaska's Native population is rich in innovative and savvy people and asked the committee members to consider this when working with the governor's administration and proposed budget.

MR. PETERSON thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak and noted the breadth of issues on which he and other entities are interested in collaborating.

[9:37:32 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY said "guyana" and thanked Mr. Peterson for speaking on behalf of the tribal government. She expressed appreciation for Mr. Peterson's comments about tribes being part of the solution and, echoing earlier statements, finding "transformational" relationships and partnerships. She recognized that Tlingit & Haida has a long history of brokering state and tribal relations that have benefited the community of Juneau and the state.

[9:38:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON reflected on the historic nature of today's meeting. He stated, as follows:

It is not lost on me that there's a lot of misunderstanding. There are a lot of uninformed opinions of what tribes do, and what they represent, and what they're capable of, and whether or not they're in the Alaska Constitution, or whether or not they're viable entities. There has, unfortunately, been the pejorative ring of tying tribes to sovereignty or to subsistence or to, as Andrea [Sanders] pointed out, the fact that...they're referred to as stakeholders or special interest groups or just another ... entity out there. ... I'll close, Madame Chair and committee members, by saying that I think it will be a real privilege to serve with all of you on this committee and being a part of the inaugural hearing and certainly playing a small role in getting the committee formed. I view the committee as a committee of opportunity and certainly one of healing and of respect and of going forward and also putting the best foot of the Alaska Native community as a whole forward. We have many miles to go and, I think, in some respects, we have been on this journey for a long time. I'm really excited about this committee being formed. I would hope, as my final remark, that this committee goes into perpetuity as being ... a regular feature of the Alaska State Legislature in the years ahead.

9:40:54 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 9:41 a.m.