

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 12, 2020

9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes, Vice Chair
Senator John Coghill
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Mia Costello

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING

Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Lem Wheelles - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

SENATE BILL NO. 113

"An Act relating to national board certification for public school teachers."

- MOVED SB 113 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 149

"An Act relating to the start time of a day in session for public high schools."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 113

SHORT TITLE: TEACHERS: NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) HUGHES

04/15/19	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/15/19	(S)	EDC
02/18/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

02/18/20 (S) Heard & Held
02/18/20 (S) MINUTE (EDC)
03/12/20 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

LEM WHEELS, Governor's Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

ACTION NARRATIVE

9:01:45 AM

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Hughes, Coghill, and Chair Stevens.

CONFIRMATION HEARING:

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

9:02:04 AM

CHAIR STEVENS announced the confirmation hearing of Lem Wheelles, the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. He asked Mr. Wheelles to introduce himself.

9:02:29 AM

LEM WHEELLES, Governor's Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, Anchorage, Alaska, said he was born and raised in Anchorage. He graduated from Dimond High School and received degrees from the University of Alaska Anchorage, including a Master of Arts in teaching. He taught social studies at Dimond High School for his entire 16-year teaching career. For the past decade he has also taught U.S. history and government online. He was the 2018 Alaska History Teacher of the Year, a BP Teacher of Excellence, the Alaska World Affairs Council Teacher of the Year, and the Alaska Model United Nations Advisor of the Year two times.

MR. WHEELLES said he is the sponsor of Model United Nations Club and Christian Club. He has been the student government advisor for a decade. He related that Dimond student government was awarded the National Gold Council of Excellence Award, currently the only school in Alaska with this distinction. He has also

served on the Anchorage School District Assessment Inventory Steering Committee, as the Elections Chair for the Anchorage Education Association, and parliamentarian for the NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly. For the past year, he has served as a subject matter expert for the U.S. Census Statistics in Schools program and he is currently a Statistics in Schools ambassador.

MR. WHEELS said his mission as an educator is to inspire students to be engaged citizens. His ultimate objective is to challenge his students to not just learn about their government, but to be an active part of it. As a government teacher, he is often asked about his political views. He said that he does not share his political views with students because it would be unethical to do so, but it could also potentially sway them. What is important is that students form political views and have the ability to articulate them. He teaches a wide variety of political beliefs and ideologies so students can form an educated opinion and engage in civic discourse with each other. He noted that members on this committee come from different political parties, but that the committee meets regularly, members respect one another, engage in thoughtful discourse to achieve the goal of doing what is best for Alaska. His goal as a teacher is to prepare his students for those same conversations, whether in their homes, social media, their workplace, or in the state Capitol.

MR. WHEELS said that his goal as a teacher leader and member of the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) is to hold his colleagues to high standards. As a recent appointee to the commission, he has attended the last two commission meetings. At the last meeting, he proposed putting reminders in the PTPC newsletter to inform educators about appropriate ways to handle politics in the classroom. He emphasized his goal, which is to be proactive and address the issue before it becomes a complaint before the PTPC. However, if it reaches that level, then he is prepared to act appropriately.

MR. WHEELS explained that as a quasi-judicial body, the PTPC is asked to adjudicate complaints against certificated educators. He said he appreciates that the legislature created the PTPC over 50 years ago to allow educators a means to hold their colleagues accountable, but also so that a jury of their peers can judge educators. If he were ever the subject of a complaint with the PTPC, he would want to be judged by his peers since educators understand what it means to be a teacher or administrator in 2020. The PTPC is made up of five teachers, a principal, a superintendent, a representative from higher

education, and a representative from the Department of Education and Early Development. This is a group of educational professionals who understand the challenges of teaching and want public education to be esteemed throughout Alaska. As a body, the PTCP works to promote professional and ethical behavior by all Alaskan educators through proactive education and outreach and by responding to complaints when a violation has occurred. The current state budget crisis has hampered Alaska's school districts from attracting and retaining quality educators. This makes the PTPC's role all the more important. As districts hire new-to-the-profession and new-to-Alaska educators, these teachers must be educated on the professional teaching code of ethics and the potential consequences for violations. He said his goal is to increase PTPC outreach and education efforts to ensure that all educators are familiar with the code of ethics for their professional practice. He offered his view that he is an excellent candidate for the PTCP since he is a lifelong Alaskan, a career educator, with statewide connections. He stays well informed on current education issues in the state and believes he is respected by educators throughout Alaska.

CHAIR STEVENS said that he appreciates him putting his name forward. Chair Stevens said that civics education has always been important to him. He said appreciated Mr. Wheelles creating citizens in his classrooms. He asked how successful school districts are in teaching responsibilities of citizenship.

MR. WHEELLES replied that is beyond the purview of the PTPC. He agrees that it is an important mission of schools. The state requires students to complete a government course to graduate. In education, there is always room for improvement, that the state is doing a good job, but it could always improve.

[9:10:58 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH observed that Mr. Wheelles had explained his background so thoroughly that he had no questions for him.

CHAIR STEVENS shared that Senator Costello is listening online.

[9:11:39 AM](#)

At ease

[9:11:45 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony and after determining no one wished to testify, closed public testimony on the confirmation of Mr. Wheelles.

He solicited a motion.

[9:12:45 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointment be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Lem Wheelles - Anchorage

Signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[9:13:20 AM](#)

At ease

SB 113-TEACHERS: NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION

[9:14:17 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 113, "An Act relating to national board certification for public school teachers."

He noted that this is the second hearing on this bill.

[9:14:28 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES, speaking as sponsor of SB 113, said high-quality teachers can improve student outcomes. That is what the committee wants to see, so she appreciates the committee support.

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony, ascertained there was none, and closed public testimony on SB 113.

He noted that there was one fiscal note from the Department of Education and Early Development.

He solicited a motion.

[9:15:16 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES moved to report SB 113, work order 31-LS0869/A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note. Chair Stevens found no objection and SB 113 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

9:15:27 AM

At ease

9:17:14 AM

CHAIR WILSON reconvened the meeting and reviewed the upcoming committee schedule.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:17 a.m.