

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 19, 2020

9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes, Vice Chair (via teleconference)
Senator John Coghill
Senator Mia Costello (via teleconference)
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

University of Alaska Board of Regents
Cachet Garrett - Fairbanks

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CACHET GARRETT, Appointee, Student Regent
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

SHERRI BERRETA, Regent
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported confirmation of Cachet Garrett.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:01:46 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 Coghill, Begich, and Chair Stevens. Senator Hughes and Costello joined the meeting via teleconference as it was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)
University of Alaska Board of Regents

[9:02:03 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the confirmation hearing of Cachet Garrett, the Governor's Student Regent Appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. He asked Ms. Garrett to introduce herself.

[9:02:40 AM](#)

CACHET GARRETT, Appointee Student Regent, University of Alaska Board of Regents, Fairbanks, Alaska, introduced herself and stated that she has been serving as the student regent for the University of Alaska (UA) for almost one year of a two-year term. When she started last May, she came ready to deal with the challenges at hand. The governor appointed her after she was elected by students at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) to be a nominee. The regents' main task presently is to create a university system that aligns with the new budget while preserving the university's values and mission.

MS. GARRETT said the regent workload her first year has been about five times that of an average year. She has gained experience and expertise that she is not sure she would have gained after two years of a normal regent term. Her main role is as a conduit of communication from the students to the board. She has met regularly with students, both physically and telephonically. The students feel heard and honored at this time, during a difficult process of reducing programmatic offerings and services. The regents have accomplished a lot this year and she looks forward to the work ahead.

MS. GARRETT said she is comfortable with the unknown ahead. Her experience, education, and leadership skills have prepared her for this position. Her background is in health and wellness. She is a licensed massage therapist in Alaska.

CHAIR STEVENS noted that this appointment runs through the end of May 2021 and asked if she would still be a student at the end

of May 2021, the term of the appointment, because that is a requirement.

MS. GARRETT said the student regent is a unique position. Statute says there must be an election for the student regent and then names be submitted to the governor's team for a nomination. Up to two regents from each campus can be presented. Then the regents make a recommendation to the governor. The governor typically appoints the student regent in late May and the student begins service June 1 and the following April the student regent is confirmed by the legislature.

CHAIR STEVENS noted that Senator Costello and Senator Hughes were online. He asked if she would still be a student when her term ends.

MS. GARRETT answered yes; her term as student regent will end in May 2021 and she will finish her graduate studies in December 2021.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what her goals are as regent for the next year.

MS. GARRETT responded that the main thing to accomplish is to attend to the declining budget. The university has a \$25 million cut this fiscal year and next, followed by \$20 million cut the third year. Her significant duty now is to support the board in the work of eliminating, reducing, and restructuring to match the budget that is presented to the university.

[9:12:15 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said he has talked to Regents Parker and Perdue, who have said good things about her service. He asked about her take on the Anchorage School of Education accreditation failure and how she would address the absolute decline in teachers being trained at the university.

MS. GARRETT replied the issue with the School of Education arose before her term and she is striving to understand how that came about. It is very much in her mind as the board moves forward. She would like to see if she can have an impact for the teacher education system to be highly functional. It is an unfortunate situation.

SENATOR BEGICH noted that since spring 2017, enrollment has fallen by 1,419 to 872, and said he looks forward to the Board of Regents taking action on that. He asked her opinion and

response to the president's initiatives to consolidate the three campuses.

MS. GARRETT responded that she honored Senator Begich for his passion for teacher education in the state. The board shares his concern and wants to rectify the situation as quickly as possible. She talked to many students, faculty, and staff about consolidation. The overwhelming response was no interest in moving to a single accreditation and there was no proof of financial savings. The regents have paused that conversation until 2021. She does not know if that conversation will return during her term of service. She personally has not been in support of that idea, but in this rapidly changing environment, if new information supports that, the board will be open to considering it.

SENATOR BEGICH asked for her general thoughts about the regents' responsibility regarding COVID-19.

MS. GARRETT answered that she cannot really speak to it because so much is unknown, but it is a major disruption to students' lives. She said the safety and well-being of students is her priority. During a difficult time for the university, COVID-19 is an unexpected complication in all regards. The role of the board is to ensure student needs are met and questions are answered and to empower the faculty and staff who are acting marvelously in spite of these recent complications.

CHAIR STEVENS said attracting teachers to the state has always been a major focus of the legislature, so it was a shock to learn of the loss of accreditation in Anchorage. He asked whether there should be one School of Education in three locations or one school in Fairbanks and one in Juneau providing services in Anchorage.

MS. GARRETT replied she does not have an answer about the direction, but it is a huge priority to have a strong teacher education program in the state. She said she is confident the university will be able to reestablish a highly functional teacher program.

[9:23:32 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO said the university presentations to the legislature show that declining enrollment preceded budget constraints. She asked what specific steps are being taken to increase student enrollment.

MS. GARRETT answered that declining enrollment is happening across the nation. It is not going away because of issues that are beyond Alaska and the Board of Regents. She said the university will see impacts from COVID-19 and the budget situation. Recruiting and boasting about the university is tricky when programs are being dismantled and enrollment is declining. The board, legislators, and the governor all need to be innovative, collaborative, and creative to have strong, successful universities that have different trends in student enrollment. Everyone wants Alaskans educated and is working together on the same mission.

CHAIR STEVENS expressed concern about declining enrollment and asked how potential students view the university's reputation.

MS. GARRETT responded that due to her heavy workload and studies, she has not gone to high schools and does not know how those students feel. She does know that UA is an accomplished, world-class university with many offerings to attract students of all ages. She would like, if things settle down, to get to high school audiences to talk about her personal experiences. She would still, in the midst of chaos, choose the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) rather than any other university in any other state. She has a lot of pride in her university. She is an alumna from the University of Alaska Southeast and is looking forward to being an alumna from UAF.

[9:31:13 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said thank you for being willing to serve. She recapped the previous statement and response about enrollment decline and noted the university's work on increasing middle college enrollment, which allows high school students to earn college credits and potentially an associate degree by the time they graduate from high school. She said that is a tremendous opportunity for the university to keep students in state and it is also a savings to school districts. She asked Ms. Garrett to carry that to the board to help combat the enrollment decline.

SENATOR HUGHES pointed out that UA is not at the top of the U.S. News and World Report rankings, despite Ms. Garrett calling it world class. Some programs, particularly at UAF, are ranked higher, but in general the university is not. Because high-achieving high school students want to go to higher quality schools, the university generally is not drawing in students nationally or globally. UAF draws some and some come to Alaska to enjoy the great outdoors, but she does not think these students come because the university is world class. She offered

her belief that a university becomes world class because it has particular programs that are superior to similar programs in other universities. But UA cannot be all things to everyone and all programs. A few programs must be picked where Alaska can shine. She asked Ms. Garrett if she has thought about focusing on a few programs that could draw students from around the globe and keep Alaska students in state.

MS. GARRETT said she attended a celebration of a middle college launch at UAF and the board is excited about such opportunities. It is a reflection of changing trends nationally. Middle college looks like a wave of the future, educating high school students to a higher level and enabling them to graduate with an associate degree and diploma. She shares Senator Hughes' concern about the declining enrollment. Some of the programs that will be key are STEM programs. Science and climate research and social and economic studies are key for Alaska. She and the board want to hear from state leaders about what programs to prioritize. She said that as a regent and Alaskan, she invites ongoing conversations. She personally believes that the world is undergoing so much rapid change that it is difficult to concretely answer questions like that. Everyone needs to step back to look at the overall picture to see what will emerge as gems to safeguard. The changes are unprecedented, so it is important to continue to communicate.

SENATOR HUGHES observed that things like Arctic studies and climate change make sense for Alaska because the University of Oklahoma probably will not face those issues. She said she isn't sure what particular programs shine, but she hopes the regents focus on that because that is how the university will draw students and improve the reputation of the university.

CHAIR STEVENS added that he would also like biology and fisheries research and wildlife management to be stressed because they are important to Alaska.

SENATOR HUGHES said the state is trying to turn the ship for K-12 students regarding reading proficiency and Senator Begich has a bill on that subject. She noted that in the past when legislators asked the university about its reading instruction methods to train teachers, the university seemed somewhat defensive saying they were doing it correctly. If that were the case, the results would be apparent in the classrooms where those UA graduates are teaching, but the state is not seeing it. She offered her belief that it will take effort to teach teachers how to effectively teach reading and suggested the

university monitor the progress of its graduates in the classrooms. She asked Ms. Garrett to take that to the board. She also asked Ms. Garret what her second priority would be.

[9:42:46 AM](#)

MS. GARRETT answered that her second priority is to get students through the current budget and pandemic situation with a lot of love and compassion. For the long haul, her priority is for strong, state education. She would like to invite more communication going forward. If she were in charge of the state, reading would be taught to younger students by older students. She would have most subjects presented to younger students by older students. That is a model of education that is missing, more mentorship and tutorial from older students for younger students. She wishes she had a mentor to guide her through her graduate program.

CHAIR STEVENS said the committee has spent a lot of time on Senator Begich's bill and learned a lot. The university must produce teachers who are adept at teaching reading to children, but the university must help teachers who are already in the field to bring them up to best practices.

SENATOR BEGICH shared that he had a last thought that may be uncomfortable for Ms. Garrett. He said he supports her nomination, and he values the endorsements that she received from Regents Parker and Perdue. He relayed that one of the reasons that the committee asks a wide range of questions is because members want to know the temperament of the people who serve on boards and commissions and how they will work with other public leaders. He said this is not a question and she does not need to respond because he will still support her appointment, but the text she recently sent to a number of people that another senator ought to be reprimanded for asking hard questions in the Finance Committee raised questions about her temperament and ability to work in situations where there may be criticism. He said legislators have tough jobs too and their job is to ask questions that get to the heart of an issue and help determine whether the person can comport him or herself in a position of public trust. He said he and she have known each other for a decade and he trusts that she will continue to do a fine job on the Board of Regents, but he would suggest that as hard as those questions may have been, it is the role of a senator to ask those questions. He said he hopes she understands that. He asked the record to reflect this.

MS. GARRETT replied she was grateful that he brought it up because it has been on her mind. She said her first Senate confirmation hearing caught her off guard primarily because she serves on the same team as the senator on a mission in support of individuals in the same state. As a leader, she also expects exceptional leadership. She apologized if she was out of line, but she offered her belief that legislators can speak to people off the record to ascertain the nature of a situation before exposing it in a public manner. As she grows in her leadership, she said she hopes that she will grow more respectful of others and lead with an intention to serve.

SENATOR BEGICH thanked her for the response. In addition to Northern studies, he would include anthropology and history, which are necessary for Alaskan programming. He thanked her for her comments about the need to learn and grow in these positions and the nature of discovering humility in going through these processes.

MS. GARRETT expressed appreciation to the committee.

[9:54:11 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing for the Board of Regents.

[9:55:01 AM](#)

SHERRI BERRETA, Regent, University of Alaska Board of Regents, Eagle River, Alaska, said Regent Garrett has been through a challenge. She answered committee questions with a great deal of thought and composure. In the meetings that she has had with Regent Garrett, she has been professional and thoughtful. Everybody has different reactions to situations. She is an emotional person, but she cares deeply. She puts representing students at the forefront. In this time of uncertainty within the university, state, and world, having stability with her term would be helpful for the Board of Regents. The board looks to student regents as future leaders. In the five years she has served on the board, she has viewed amazing young people in the community and she looks for great things from Regent Garrett. The University of Alaska has real challenges and the board hopes it can get through this current crisis so it can deal with the big issue of education. That is on the agenda with all the other challenges. She said she supports Cachet Garrett as the student regent.

[9:58:14 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS closed public testimony and solicited a motion.

[9:58:33 AM](#)

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

University of Alaska Board of Regents
Cachet Garrett - Fairbanks

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.

[9:59:05 AM](#)

At ease

[9:59:55 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:59 a.m.