

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 6, 2019
9:01 a.m.

[9:01:45 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stedman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Natasha von Imhof, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Mike Shower
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Michael Johnson, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development.

SUMMARY

^CONSIDERATION OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR SUCCESSOR APPOINTEE:

[9:03:22 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, stated that he was born and raised in Georgia. His father was an engineer, and his mother was an administrative assistant. He stated that his grandmother was a schoolteacher, and an influence in his life. He came to Alaska originally for summer camp, and then received his teaching certificate. He stated that he taught in a multi-grade school in a Copper River School District. He

eventually became a principal at a school and then superintendent.

Co-Chair Stedman queried the reason that he should be the successor to the lieutenant governor.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he had never been elected to public office. He shared that he had led the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), and Governor Dunleavy knew his character.

[9:05:57 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof noted that the Copper River School District had broadband connectivity that had transformed the district. She queried how the efforts in broadband may have influenced his appointment.

Commissioner Johnson explained his experience in the school district. He remarked that the students had received less options for the education, and remarked that technology allowed for expanding their educational options while also reducing costs.

Senator Wielechowski remarked that it was possible for the successor to assume the role of lieutenant governor. He queried the general philosophy of government.

Commissioner Johnson replied that his general philosophy of government is that it is "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Co-Chair Stedman queried the issues of initiatives, referendums, and recalls.

[9:10:07 AM](#)

Commissioner Johnson replied that he was currently focused on his job as commissioner.

Co-Chair Stedman queried the potential duties of guarding the state seal.

Commissioner Johnson replied that the state seal is the only seal that has a seal in the state seal. He remarked that the use of the state seal was prohibited without permission from the lieutenant governor.

Senator Micciche wondered whether he should be considered "Doctor Johnson."

Commissioner Johnson replied in the affirmative.

Senator Micciche wondered whether his resume was old, because it did include his job of commissioner.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he had not updated resume since he became commissioner.

Senator Micciche noted that there were some issues with election integrity.

Commissioner Johnson replied that there was a mission statement to address that issue.

Senator Hoffman queried the travel experience in Alaska, particularly those in western Alaska.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he was able to travel above the Arctic Circle, and he had also traveled to many other rural sites.

Senator Hoffman wondered whether Commissioner Johnson knew the location of the community of Igiugig.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he did not know.

Senator Hoffman stressed that every community had a school and it was the focal point of the community.

[9:15:30 AM](#)

Commissioner Johnson replied that in his experience, those facilities were an integral part of community. He stated that he used the word, "community" as both a noun and a verb.

Senator Hoffman wondered how the current funding status could be viewed, and asked whether the people of Alaska were served adequately.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he did not feel that the education system was adequately serving Alaskans.

Senator Wielechowski wondered whether there was support for the governor's budget, which cut \$20 million from education, and whether he was consulted beforehand. He also wondered whether school districts were consulted before that cut was made to examine the impacts.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he supported the governor's proposed supplemental budget. He stated that he was consulted on the governor's budget. He discussed a number of possibilities to meet the needs as a result of the earthquake. He stated that he did not consult individual school districts before the \$20 million cut proposal.

[9:20:23 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof queried plans to run for higher office in the future.

Commissioner Johnson replied in the negative.

Senator Olson queried the concept of boarding schools in hub communities. He stated that he had a good experience in boarding school.

Commissioner Johnson replied that it was important to define boarding school. He stated that there were some incidences where students were forced to attend a boarding school, and he did not support that practice. He supported the current residential school programs in the state.

Senator Olson wondered whether there were plans to create regional boarding schools.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he was not currently working on any new boarding schools. He noted that he would like a dozen more Northwestern Career and Technical Center (NACTEC) style schools.

Senator Bishop noted that the graduation before NACTEC was in the low 40 percent. The graduation rates were almost in the 80 percent range.

[9:24:46 AM](#)

Commissioner Johnson noted that it was a privilege to do the study with the people who were generous enough to continue with the project.

Senator Wielechowski remarked that voter turnout had decreased in the state. He wondered whether there were any election reforms, or ways to increase voter turnout.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he had not given much thought to election reform, except recognizing that it was a responsibility. He stated that, if he served in the position, he would serve with the humility knowing that he was serving in elected office.

Co-Chair Stedman asked whether there would be interesting things on the internet.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he was not aware of anything on the internet.

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether he had ever been arrested or indicted.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he had not.

Co-Chair Stedman asked whether he had provided an embellished resume.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he had not.

Co-Chair Stedman did not want the public to take those questions out of context. The questions were unrelated to the history of the appointee.

[9:30:18 AM](#)

Senator Micciche felt that the highest honor had been commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development, so he encouraged the appointee to include that on his resume.

Commissioner Johnson agreed to update his resume. He noted that it was the same resume that he had used throughout his career.

Senator Bishop understood what it felt like to be questioned on the other side of the table. He also noted

the right of privacy. He wondered whether Commissioner Johnson had seen the movie, "Trading Places."

Commissioner Johnson replied that he had not.

Senator Bishop felt that there be a better black pen used on the resume for privacy.

Senator Wielechowski wondered whether additional cuts to education funding could be sustained.

Co-Chair Stedman felt that was a budget question.

Commissioner Johnson remarked that it was never easy to make budget cuts, but had confidence in the families and educators of Alaska to provide the best education to the students in the state.

Co-Chair Stedman stressed that education was a concern of the committee, and encouraged a presentation on the budget.

[9:35:56 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski wondered whether the constitution should be changed to allow for public funds to be used for private or religious schools.

Commissioner Johnson responded that the constitution should not be changed without the vote of people, and a change like that required a very serious conversation.

Senator Wielechowski wanted to know the position on the issue, as the DEED commissioner.

Commissioner Johnson responded that he did not want to avoid the question, but he did not want to create an unrealistic box. He noted that many families used publicly funded homeschool opportunities, so he would not want his answer to prevent them from accessing some of the options available. He did not believe it included private schools.

Senator Bishop felt that there would be a cost and needs analysis to the issue.

Commissioner Johnson agreed.

[9:40:39 AM](#)

Senator Micciche wondered whether, if he were in the position of Lt. Governor, and a citizen's initiative that had constitutional challenges, he would follow the law in accordance with the constitution.

Commissioner Johnson replied that he would put the law before his own personal bias.

[9:42:00 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:44:13 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Stedman FORWARDED the appointment of Michael Johnson for consideration in accordance with Alaska Statute. He relayed that this did not reflect an intent by any member Senate Finance Committee to vote for or against the confirmation of the individual during any further sessions.

There being NO OBJECTION, it was so ordered.

Co-Chair Stedman discussed the following day's agenda.

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ADJOURNMENT

[9:46:04 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 a.m.