

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

April 2, 2021

8:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Ivy Spohnholz, Co-Chair
Representative Calvin Schrage
Representative Liz Snyder
Representative James Kaufman
Representative Ken McCarty (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Zack Fields, Co-Chair
Representative David Nelson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Board of Examiners in Optometry

Pamela Steffes - Sitka
Michael Mavencamp - Fairbanks

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 126

"An Act extending the termination date of the Board of Public Accountancy; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 126 OUT OF COMMITTEE

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):

Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors

Jake Maxwell - Anchorage
Arpad "Bruce" Magyar - Anchorage
Catherine Fritz - Anchorage

- HEARD AND HELD

Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy

Nathan Missler - Anchorage

- HEARD AND HELD

Board of Dental Examiners

Christina Hansen - Fairbanks

Greg Johnson - Fairbanks

Brad Heaston - Eagle River

- HEARD AND HELD

Board of Marital & Family Therapy

Richard Clampitt - Palmer

Joy Collins - Anchorage

Kayla Green - Eagle River

- HEARD AND HELD

Board of Professional Counselors

Sammie O'Neil - Eagle River

Eleanor Vinson - Juneau

- HEARD AND HELD

Board of Psychologist & Psychological Examiners

Bernard Gatewood - Fairbanks

Dr. Sherri Scott - Anchorage

Dr. Bradley McConnell - Anchorage

- HEARD AND HELD

Board of Social Work Examiners

Brandon Ercanbrack - Kotzebue

- HEARD AND HELD

Regulatory Commission of Alaska

Bob Pickett - Palmer

Keith Kurber - Fairbanks

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 126

SHORT TITLE: EXTEND BOARD OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTANCY

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) THOMPSON

03/05/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/21	(H)	L&C, FIN
03/31/21	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/31/21	(H)	Heard & Held
03/31/21	(H)	MINUTE (L&C)
04/02/21	(H)	L&C AT 8:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

PAMELA STEFFES, Appointee
Board of Examiners in Optometry
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Examiners in Optometry.

CRISTA BURSON, President and CEO
Alaska Society of Certified Public Accountants
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 126.

JAKE MAXWELL, Appointee
Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors.

ARPAD "BRUCE" MAGYAR, Appointee
Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors.

CATHERINE FRITZ, Appointee
Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors.

NATHAN MISSLER, Appointee
Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy.

CHRISTINA HANSEN, Appointee

Board of Dental Examiners

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Dental Examiners.

GREG JOHNSON, Appointee

Board of Dental Examiners

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Dental Examiners.

BRAD HEASTON, Appointee

Board of Dental Examiners

Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Dental Examiners.

MICHAEL MAVENCAMP, Appointee

Board of Examiners in Optometry

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Examiners in Optometry.

RICHARD CLAMPITT, Appointee

Board of Marital & Family Therapy

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Marital & Family Therapy.

JOY COLLINS, Appointee

Board of Marital & Family Therapy

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Marital & Family Therapy.

KAYLA GREEN, Appointee

Board of Marital & Family Therapy

Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Marital & Family Therapy.

SAMMIE O'NEIL, Appointee

Board of Professional Counselors
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Professional Counselors.

ELEANOR VINSON, Appointee
Board of Professional Counselors
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Professional Counselors.

BERNARD GATEWOOD, Appointee
Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners.

DR. SHERRI SCOTT, Appointee
Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners.

DR. BRADLEY MCCONNELL, Appointee
Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners.

BRANDON ERCANBRACK, Appointee
Board of Social Work Examiners
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Social Work Examiners.

BOB PICKETT, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

KEITH KURBER, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

VERI DI SUVERO, Executive Director
Alaska Public Interest Research Group
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on the governor's appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:06:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR IVY SPOHNHOLZ called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Spohnholz, Schrage, and Snyder were present at the call to order. Representative McCarty (via teleconference) and Representative Kaufman arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Board of Examiners in Optometry

[8:07:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the first order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointee to the Board of Examiners in Optometry.

[8:07:41 AM](#)

PAMELA STEFFES, Appointee, Board of Examiners in Optometry, informed the committee that she has served for five years on the Board of Examiners in Optometry. She noted that the documents in the committee packet were submitted for her 2020 consideration, and that her updated information includes an updated Alaska optometry license, valid through 2022. She said that she has practiced for 22 years at the Southeast Alaska Regional Healthcare Consortium (SEARHC) facility in Sitka, and expressed that, as a hospital-based optometrist, she has a slightly different perspective from optometrists in private practice. She described her work on the board guiding optometrists to safely practice, as well as renew their licenses, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Examiners in Optometry was held over.]

HB 126-EXTEND BOARD OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTANCY

[8:09:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 126, "An Act extending the termination date of the Board of Public Accountancy; and providing for an effective date."

[8:09:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on HB 126.

[8:10:06 AM](#)

CRISTA BURSON, President and CEO, Alaska Society of Certified Public Accountants, stated that the Alaska Society of Certified Public Accountants (AKCPA) supports HB 126, characterizing the Board of Public Accountancy as serving the public's interest and providing regular oversight of accountants in Alaska. She expressed that the board is inclusive of all interested parties, and that the AKCPA and the board have a positive, collaborative relationship.

[8:11:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE moved to report HB 126 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 126 was reported out of the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee.

[8:11:53 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:11 a.m. to 8:14 a.m.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors

[8:14:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees to the State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors.

[8:14:45 AM](#)

JAKE MAXWELL, Appointee, Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors, told the committee that he has been appointed for the land surveyor's seat and that he has worked as a land surveyor for the past 18 years. He described being well-versed in the field and office operations of land surveying, and characterized himself as having a solid understanding of the guidelines and standards applied at federal, state, and local levels. He said that he has served on the board of directors of the Alaska Professional Design Council, during which he learned about some of the issues surrounding other professional societies. He stated his belief that his experience would add value and a helpful perspective to the board.

[8:15:59 AM](#)

ARPAD "BRUCE" MAGYAR, Appointee, Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors, said that as a public member of the board, he hopes to bring his experience in the public and private sector. He described his experience as a heavy equipment operator, followed by a career in pharmaceutical sales, and was selected to oversee the development of a home health care business. Upon retirement, he said, he moved to Florida where he spent 12 years being active in the local U.S. Coast Guard facility. In total, he said, he's lived in 10 states and had 23 homes, and he expressed that each move required creative problem solving skills, which is why he feels he has the unique experience needed to contribute to the board.

[8:18:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE noted that on Mr. Magyar's application of interest he didn't select this particular board to serve on.

MR. MAGYAR said that his contribution would be experience in business, as well as in handling personnel, projects, and budgets. He said that he was successful in three states in advocating for legislation advantageous to the pharmaceutical industry.

[8:20:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted Mr. Magyar had applied to be on the Alaska Marine Highway System workgroup, and if that wasn't available, she said, he requested to be on the Board of Marine Pilots, the Alaska Boating Safety Advisory Council, the Alaska Board of Pharmacy, the Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission, or the Board of Fisheries. She reiterated Representative

Schrage's observation that nowhere did he express interest in serving on the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors. She asked whether he spoke with the Office of Boards and Commissions.

MR. MAGYAR responded that he had applied for the Alaska Marine Highway System workgroup a year ago but did not receive an answer. Some months later he received a call from the Office of the Governor to serve on the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked what interests Mr. Magyar most about serving on this board, given that he would be learning about the industry.

MR. MAGYAR mentioned an individual who moved to Georgia and discussed perceptions of life in Alaska. He talked about the cost of living and the importance of good-paying jobs.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ said that the Board of Nursing had difficulty recruiting someone into the position because the compensation didn't match the level of education that was required, and the solution proposed by the administration was to reduce the level of education instead of increase compensation.

[8:26:02 AM](#)

CATHERINE FRITZ, Appointee, Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors, informed the committee that she is an architect and has been appointed to serve a second term on the board. Her career has been in public service, she said, most recently as the architect for Juneau International Airport. She described her work involving the planning and organizing aspects of drafting the strategic plan, ensuring that each meeting proceeds in a manner consistent with the board's mission, and studying the regulatory needs as well as health, safety, and welfare. She said that it's been an honor and a privilege to serve on the board.

[8:27:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the appointees to the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers & Land Surveyors was held over.]

Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy

[8:28:04 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointee for the Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy.

[8:28:24 AM](#)

NATHAN MISSLER, Appointee, Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy, said that he has been an Occupational Therapist for five years with experience in outpatient orthopedics, as well as in academics at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He expressed the desire to be on the board in order to work on current issues such as telemedicine, continuing educations, and safety in Alaska's communities.

[8:29:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the appointee to the Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy was held over.]

Board of Dental Examiners

[8:29:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees for the Board of Dental Examiners.

[8:30:00 AM](#)

CHRISTINA HANSEN, Appointee, Board of Dental Examiners, informed the committee that she has been a dental hygienist for six years and was a dental assistant for 20 years. She said that she works in the office of a dental hygienist and teaches dental assisting at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She said that

she would like to bring her experience and a "gentle voice" to the board.

[8:31:19 AM](#)

GREG JOHNSON, Appointee, Board of Dental Examiners, said that he has been a licensed dentist in Alaska since 1986 and has worked as a pediatric dentist for most of his career. He explained that he recently served as the Chief Medical Officer at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital Denali Center, serving as the Chief Executive Officer during the transition to Foundation Health Partners. He said that he has participated on the Medical Care Advisory Committee for Medicaid.

[8:32:39 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:32 a.m. to 8:37 a.m.

[8:37:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY asked the appointees their opinion on the advanced practice permit for dental hygienists which would be created under HB 111.

[8:38:01 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON answered that he would need to know more about the proposed legislation.

[8:38:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE pointed out that Dr. Johnson indicated on his application that he would not be willing to provide a personal financial disclosure. He asked Dr. Johnson for the reason.

DR. JOHNSON answered that he finds it intrusive for the purpose of this board and pointed out that he hasn't been audited. He said that "those types of questions will oftentimes limit commoners ... from stepping forward."

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that the concern is not malfeasance, but conflicts of interest. He said that the forms are generic, asking for businesses the appointee has been involved with, as well as broad compensation brackets. He expressed concern that Dr. Johnson was not willing to disclose.

DR. JOHNSON replied that he wouldn't have a problem with generic and minor reporting, and he pointed out that he has completed conflict of interest and codes of ethics forms.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE noted that the committee would find out whether financial disclosures are required for the Board of Dental Examiners.

[8:41:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ stated that the disclosure is fairly generic. She then read the Public Official Financial Disclosure statute, AS 39.50.010(b), which read as follows:

(b) The people of the State of Alaska declare that
(1) public office is a public trust that should be free from the danger of conflict of interest;

(2) the public has a right to know of the financial and business interests of persons who seek or hold public office;

(3) a compelling state interest requires that candidates for office and office holders disclose their personal and business financial interests;

(4) reasonable disclosure requirements do not violate an individual's right to privacy when the individual seeks or holds public office and a compelling state interest in the disclosure exists; and

(5) reasonable disclosure requirements do not have the effect of chilling the exercise of the right of a qualified person to seek or hold public office.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted that a board or commission is a public trust, and those serving on them are asked to make decisions affecting people's livelihoods. She encouraged Dr. Johnson to look at the public disclosure process.

[8:42:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAUFMAN mentioned that AS 39.50.200 does not specifically list the Board of Dental Examiners and said that it's worth checking.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted that financial disclosures are something commonly done as a matter of best practice.

REPRESENTATIVE KAUFMAN said, "Increasingly, though, people are becoming more and more aware and alarmed at privacy. It's a big issue out in the world, with the Internet, information, and the flow of it, so I can respect it."

[8:44:09 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON stated his agreement with the statutes, as written, and said the operative word is "reasonable." He said, "If it's reasonable, I'll absolutely fill it out, no questions asked."

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ thanked Dr. Johnson and noted that it's "fairly generic" in nature.

[8:44:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY expressed agreement with Co-Chair Spohnholz' statements.

[8:45:19 AM](#)

BRAD HEASTON, Appointee, Board of Dental Examiners, explained that his background consists of information technology management and that he is a Microsoft systems certified engineer and a certified Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) security professional. He stated that he would bring a pragmatic approach to troubleshooting and experience with HIPAA policies, procedures, and security risk assessment to the board.

[8:46:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the appointees to the Board of Dental Examiners. There being no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[8:47:14 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[8:47:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ informed committee members that Sara Chambers with the Department of Commerce, Community, & Economic

Development (DCCED) said that appointees to the Board of Dental Examiners are not required to adhere to the disclosure requirements under AS 39.50.010(b), although it is a "best practice."

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Dental Examiners was held over.]

Board of Examiners in Optometry

[8:48:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees to the Board of Examiners in Optometry.

[8:48:44 AM](#)

MICHAEL MAVENCAMP, Appointee, Board of Examiners in Optometry, informed the committee that he is a partner in a private optometry practice, where he has practiced for the past 15 years. He expressed that his nomination is an opportunity to continue the good work done by the board and to give back to Alaska and to his profession.

[8:49:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the appointee to the Board of Examiners of Optometry. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointee to the Board of Examiners of Optometry was held over.]

Board of Marital & Family Therapy

[8:49:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees to the Board of Marital & Family Therapy.

[8:50:07 AM](#)

RICHARD CLAMPITT, Appointee, Board of Marital & Family Therapy, said that he's retired from the Alaska Air National Guard and is licensed as a professional counselor as well as a marital and

family therapist, serving as the supervisor for people who are seeking licensure in Alaska. He expressed interest in doing his "part," both as a citizen and a professional.

[8:51:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY asked Mr. Clampitt what is important in encouraging the profession of marriage and family therapy in the state.

MR. CLAMPITT replied that there are not enough providers for the need, especially in the rural communities. He said that learning how to use telehealth resources more effectively would be helpful.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY asked Mr. Clampitt what he knows about the relationship between providers and the Medicaid population.

MR. CLAMPITT responded that he does not know any provider who has served the Medicaid population.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY expressed curiosity about that lack of service.

MR. CLAMPITT replied that he would be glad to look into the issue.

[8:53:58 AM](#)

JOY COLLINS, Appointee, Board of Marital & Family Therapy, informed the board that she has a master's degree in psychology with an emphasis in marriage and family therapy, and is a registered play therapist. She said that she would like to be a voice and advocate for her colleagues, and she characterized herself as a person of strong ethics and integrity who will look at issues from the client's perspective as well as the therapist's. She expressed that she has the ability to be objective and impartially weigh evidence before making a decision.

[8:54:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY asked Ms. Collins what she would bring to the board as far as diversity.

MS. COLLINS answered that she works with children through play therapy, along with the marriage and family therapy roles. In

response to Representative McCarty, she explained that play therapy is a great way for parents to understand children, and for children to express themselves. She pointed out that children don't have developed speech communication or cognition, so play is a great way for adults to meet children at their own level.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY expressed that he has "high regards" for play therapists and thanked Ms. Collins for her work.

[8:56:48 AM](#)

KAYLA GREEN, Appointee, Board of Marital & Family Therapy, told the board about her children's educational levels and said that she has worked in health care for two years at North Star Behavioral Health and the Southcentral Foundation. She talked about her activism and community service.

[8:58:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY asked Ms. Green whether she has thoughts about reducing licensing costs.

MS. GREEN replied that she would like to see a reduction in costs for the majority of licensees, and said that she would like to know how the license cost was decided. She said that during the COVID-19 pandemic the focus has been on getting people licensed, as well as focusing on online continuing education.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY shared the understanding that many states are considering grouping together all of the state boards governing matters of behavioral science. He asked Ms. Green whether she has thoughts on that.

MS. GREEN said that she would need to have more information.

[9:02:16 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked Ms. Green to clarify her answer to Representative McCarty's earlier question.

MS. GREEN responded that she was talking about reducing the fee, and expressed that making continuing education more available would be a positive change.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ pointed out that licensing fees pay for the operation of the board, and suggested that Ms. Green look at the previous sunset audit to acquaint herself with the finances. She then noted Ms. Green's mention of changes over the past year that she opined should be made permanent, and asked Ms. Green for a specific example.

MS. GREEN responded that online continuing education would be a good permanent change.

[9:03:21 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Board of Marital & Family Therapy. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Marital & Family Therapy was held over.]

Board of Professional Counselors

[9:03:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees to the Board of Professional Counselors.

[9:03:59 AM](#)

SAMMIE O'NEIL, Appointee, Board of Professional Counselors, said that he is a retired veteran who has worked in the field of professional counseling for 10 years, and recently obtained his license and started his practice. He expressed interest in learning more about the process and regulations.

[9:05:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY asked Mr. O'Neill what he, as a new licensee, sees himself as being able to contribute to the board.

MR. O'NEIL replied that he would like to make the process more flexible, and expressed that there need to be mentors and support for those who want to be in the field.

[9:07:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked Mr. O'Neill which Salvation Army program he worked at.

MR. O'NEILL replied that he worked at the Clitheroe Center.

[9:07:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked Mr. O'Neill whether anything in Mr. O'Neil's past would disqualify him for board service.

MR. O'NEIL answered, "No."

[9:08:10 AM](#)

ELEANOR VINSON, Appointee, Board of Professional Counselors, informed that committee that she has lived in Valdez, Barrow, and Juneau, and expressed that her experience has helped her understand the diversity and challenges facing the people in Alaska. She said that she has worked with the Board of Architects, Engineers and Surveyors, Board of Marital & Family Therapy, Board of Social Workers, Board of Professional Counseling, and Board of Nursing. She said that she has a strong background for understanding boards. She pointed out that she has served on the Board of Professional Counselors for one term and would like to continue. She expressed that a continuation of knowledge is "badly needed," considering staff turnover in combination with the number of new licenses being issued.

[9:09:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY told Ms. Vinson, "You rock." He noted that Ms. Vinson's reputation precedes her and characterized her as a professional with a wealth of information.

[9:10:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Board of Professional Counselors. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Professional Counselors was held over.]

Board of Psychologist & Psychological Examiners

[9:10:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees to the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Examiners

[9:11:05 AM](#)

BERNARD GATEWOOD, Appointee, Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners, informed the board that he has a master's degree in counseling, with a bachelor's degree in sociology, and that he has over 30 years in public service experience including juvenile corrections, mental health, nonprofit oversight, and local politics. He said that he worked in the Division of Juvenile Justice for 16 years, with oversight responsibility in several facilities. He said he has been a trustee on the Fairbanks Community Hospital Foundation, a board member on the Alaska Community Foundation, and works with the school district. He spoke of terms of licensure and the work done by the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ thanked Mr. Gatewood for his extensive service.

[9:14:00 AM](#)

DR. SHERRI SCOTT, Appointee, Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners, said that she would be the licensed psychological associate representative on the board, and that she has provided 30 years of continuous behavior health service in Alaska. She said that she has advanced education and specialized training, along with knowledge and experience in the field, mostly as a clinical supervisor. She described providing services as a licensed independent practitioner and said that she is familiar with both urban and rural issues in Alaska. She noted that she has a Master of Science in Clinical Psychology and a Master of Arts in Global Leadership, and a Doctorate in Intercultural Studies with an emphasis in Leadership Development.

[9:16:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked Dr. Scott whether she completed her doctorate.

DR. SCOTT replied that she did.

[9:16:15 AM](#)

DR. BRADLEY MCCONNELL, Appointee, Board of Psychologists & Psychological Associate Examiners, informed the committee that he is a board-certified clinical psychologist, with a master's and doctorate in Clinical Psychology and a post-doctoral degree in Clinical Psychopharmacology. He said that he's worked in mental health at the Veteran's Administration, university counseling, and the Department of Corrections. He currently serves as the staff psychologist at the Copper River Native Association. He expressed the belief that mental health services are something urgently needed in Alaska, and that Alaska has been a national leader in providing mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic through the program allowing out-of-state psychologist to temporarily provide services under the emergency courtesy license. He said that Alaska has 48 active emergency courtesy licenses, two regular courtesy licenses, and 315 active licensees. He said that he would like to serve on the board to support "home-grown" psychologists in Alaska, as many psychologists who trained in Alaska don't return after their internship.

[9:18:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTY expressed agreement with efforts to get more psychological professionals in Alaska and asked Dr. McConnell if he had any ideas for incentives.

DR. MCCONNELL responded that he thinks there could be expansions of incentives like loan repayment and a revision of State of Alaska salaries, considering the cost of living. He expressed that the Board of Psychologists & Psychological Examiners should do more to support the specific needs of psychologists as mental health practitioners.

[9:21:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ pointed out the number of people who commented during testimony on the possibility of merging the boards that deal with mental health.

[9:22:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Board of Psychologist & Psychological Associate Examiners was held over.]

Board of Social Work Examiners

[9:22:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the next order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointee to the Board of Social Work Examiners.

[9:22:24 AM](#)

BRANDON ERCANBRACK, Appointee, Board of Social Work Examiners, said that he is a licensed clinical social worker who has been practicing for almost 10 years, but has had some form of social work license since 2008. He talked about his time already served on the board, saying that he sees both challenges and opportunities for improvement. He highlighted the way social workers in Alaska have operated during the COVID-19 pandemic, dealing with people's emotional needs. He said he wants to continue serving on the board to figure out "how to do things smarter, not harder" and expressed the need for more licensed social work professionals.

[9:24:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE noted that Mr. Ercanbrack is an Eagle Scout.

[9:25:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked Mr. Ercanbrack whether he is working at Maniilaq Health Center.

MR. ERCANBRACK replied that he is, as the clinical supervisor for the Counseling and Recovery Center.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked Mr. Ercanbrack how long he has been in Kotzebue.

MR. ERCANBRACK said that he went to Kotzebue in 2017 for one year, moved to Seward, and has most recently been back in Kotzebue for a year and a half. He expressed being able to share the perspective of social workers who work off of the road system and with the tribal health organizations.

[9:26:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the governor's appointee to the Board of Social Work Examiners. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointee to the Board of Social Work Examiners was held over.]

Regulatory Commission of Alaska

[9:26:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that the final order of business would be consideration of the governor's appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

[9:26:52 AM](#)

BOB PICKETT, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, said he is the current chair of the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) and has been a commissioner since 2008. He described his background in Alaska, noting that he has worked as a surveyor in Southeast Alaska, Valdez, and the Copper River Valley. He said that prior to his service on the commission, he spent 21 years managing statewide programs for the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC).

[9:28:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked Mr. Pickett his thoughts about prerequisites and technical knowledge needed for effective service on the RCA.

MR. PICKETT answered that different commissioners bring different strengths, and working with technical issues is a big part of the work. He said the commissioners must be able to sort out questions of engineering, finance, or regulatory law, giving the appropriate weight to the evidence.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked how important it is that every member has the ability to comprehend technical information.

MR. PICKETT answered, "It is important. If they don't have it at the time they begin with the commission, trust me, they will learn it."

[9:30:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked Mr. Pickett to update the committee about the progress of the Railbelt Reliability Council (RRC).

MR. PICKETT replied that there are currently three rule-making dockets open. He explained that in 2014, the legislature directed RCA to look at the state railbelt grid and the interconnected electric utilities. He noted that Alaska has no mandatory reliability standards. He said that the commission made its recommendations on July 1, 2015, and underpinning all of its recommendations was the realization that it would be better if the utilities could come to a consensus instead of there being a "top down" imposition from RCA or legislature. He said the commission is nearing the end of the rule-making portion and will continue working.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ expressed optimism about RRC. She then pointed out that RCA is described in statute as having members who are in good standing with the Alaska Bar Association or have either achieved a degree from an accredited college or university in finance, economics, accounting, business administration, or public administration or have equivalent experience in those fields. She asked Mr. Pickett his opinion on the importance of those specific requirements when considering appointees to the commission.

MR. PICKETT responded that the education or experience is important, but that the capacity to learn, as well as communication skills and the ability to work cooperatively with other commissioners, tends to be overlooked.

[9:35:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted that the staff at RCA tends to be very technical, including administrative logistics, engineers, financial analysts, telecommunications specialists, and other technical positions. She asked Mr. Pickett how important he believes it is to have concrete experience in these areas.

MR. PICKETT said that having experience can shorten the learning curve, but no matter what someone's background is, it's like

"learning how to drink out of a firehose." He stated his belief that the analogy exists for anyone serving on the commission.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted that the commission is complex and pointed out that unlike the positions on some of the other boards, service on the commission is a full time job. She asked Mr. Pickett to discuss the scope of RCA.

MR. PICKETT explained that to the public, the most obvious issues are the electric utilities and the rate regulation of the regulated utilities. He said that there are about 120 certificated electric utilities in Alaska, and RCA regulates 33 of them, remaining engaged with the rest through the power cost equalization program to help them stay in compliance so they remain eligible for the program. He said that RCA also regulates water and sewer utilities, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline concurrently with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the intrastate pipelines in Cook Inlet. He talked about evaluating gas supply agreements, the Cook Inlet natural gas storage facility, and RCA's limited regulatory authority over the telecommunications industry. He said he's heard concerns about broadband access regulation and opined that RCA may engage with that in the future.

[9:40:34 AM](#)

DR. KEITH KURBER, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, said that he has almost 30 years of service in the U.S. Army, split between active duty, the National Guard, and the Reserves, including three wartime mobilizations. He said that he's pastored several churches and worked in public safety at the Fairbanks International Airport as a police and fire officer. His formal education was heavily weighted toward engineering, science, and math, he said, and he has a Master of Organizational Leadership and a Ph.D. in Ministry. He said that he wants to serve on RCA so he can use his combination of training and life experience to serve his state, and that his experience making critical decisions under severe pressure would be beneficial.

[9:43:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked Dr. Kurber if he would be willing to share a detailed breakdown of his educational transcripts.

DR. KURBER answered that he would.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked Dr. Kurber to submit his transcripts.

DR. KURBER noted that he had previously sent his transcripts to Senators Revak and Kiehl and would be happy to submit them to the committee.

[9:45:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked if Dr. Kurber would be comfortable with the committee sharing [his transcripts] with other legislators.

DR. KURBER replied yes.

[9:46:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAUFMAN commented on Dr. Kurber's range of military experience and pointed out that everything involved in an integrated military operation, such as logistics, supply chain management, and procurement, may not be fully understood. He asked Dr. Kurber to discuss how multi-disciplined the operations were.

DR. KURBER, in response, offered an example from 2009. He explained that the military was directed to "surge" forces out of cycle deployment to bolster the efforts in Afghanistan. As deputy commander, he was deployed to Kabul with a team tasked with securing additional funding to increase the military presence in the country, as well as working with the local population in procuring acreage, potable water, and engineering necessities to build operational structures "from the ground up."

REPRESENTATIVE KAUFMAN pointed out that those in the military readily understand the multidisciplinary aspects of mobilization, supply chain management, and project management.

[9:51:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ discussed utilities monopolies and the desire to reduce the "Balkanization" of utilities. She asked Dr. Kurber about the elements of the Railbelt Reliability Council important to controlling spending, and what kind of regulations he believes should be in place to ensure that utilities "don't go on further spending sprees."

DR. KURBER noted the many conversations between 2014 and the creation of the Railbelt Reliability Council, and said that there was work on the railbelt during that time, which he noted is continuing. He said that the stakeholders in Alaska's utilities are not waiting for findings to be returned, so it's incumbent on RCA to get their findings done and ready for legal review. He said that getting an application process in place should be a good first step towards solving the issues identified by Mr. Pickett.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked about Dr. Kurber's thoughts on the issue of economic dispatch for utilities on the railbelt.

DR. KURBER responded that there is always an effort to purchase the most energy available at a reasonable price, so the economic dispatch leads to the ability to provide a ratepayer with the lowest-priced energy available. He said he believes that with the legislative remedy, coupled with the regulations which are being worked on by RCA, the average ratepayer should get the best rate possible.

[9:58:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ said that a notable part of the creation of the Railbelt Reliability Council was that it didn't include economic dispatch, and that economic dispatch is not commonly happening in Alaska. She asked Dr. Kurber how he would advance the cause of improving economic dispatch in the state.

DR. KURBER responded that RCA will focus on meeting implementation demands, especially with respect to integrative resource planning along with the development, certification, and regulation of the electric reliability organization (ERO). He discussed targeting the security of critical infrastructure and the electricity grid, as well as ensuring the cooperatives are providing service that is safe, consistent, continuous, and of the lowest possible cost.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ said that in testimony on Senate Bill 123, during the Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) was touted as "a model for the state of Alaska." She asked Dr. Kurber in which ways he sees ERCOT being a model for Alaska, and what lessons Alaska could learn from the electrical crisis in Texas.

DR. KURBER recalled hearing "we're unique up here" upon his arrival in Alaska, and spoke of the "island" mentality. He said

that what any electricity reliability organization needs to take into account is "the peculiarity of what might be your 'disaster day,' what could be the worst thing" to happen. In the case of some states, he said, it could be the "500-year flood." He said that because of Alaska's extremes in weather and geology, Alaska is already ready in terms of disaster preparedness. He said that even though ERCOT has been touted as a model for Alaska, any reliability organization development will be "Alaskan in flavor," deriving the best practices from other organizations around the country.

[10:05:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted that during the disaster in Texas, the governor blamed the shutdown on renewable energy, which he said couldn't "handle the cold weather." She asked Dr. Kurber whether he believes renewable energy is an unsafe investment in Alaska.

DR. KURBER said he is getting a "crash course" in renewable energy and that he doesn't feel qualified to answer.

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ said that in Southeast Alaska, 99 percent of the energy comes from hydro renewable projects, and in many parts of rural Alaska there are renewable energy projects, such as wind turbines in Kotzebue. She pointed out the long track record of renewable energy working "very effectively" in the state.

[10:09:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

[10:09:57 AM](#)

VERI DI SUVERO, Executive Director, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, said that the Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating on behalf of consumers and the public interest. She said that AKPIRG advocates for a variety of issues before RCA. She noted that although she currently holds the consumer advocacy position on RRC's Implementation Committee, she is testifying as the representative of AKPIRG. She said that RCA is the highest authority of power in electric distribution for Alaska and its considerations carry extra weight. She pointed out that it is critical that RCA commissioners have the

technical skills to fully consider matters within the purview of the commission, and that to approve of an appointee who clearly does not meet the technical qualifications under statute is a disservice to Alaskans who would bear the ultimate burden in the form of lasting regulations and energy costs. She encouraged the committee to abide by those statutory conditions when considering Dr. Kurber's appointment.

[10:12:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[The confirmation on the appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska was held over.]

[10:13:06 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:13 a.m.