

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

May 8, 2024

9:05 a.m.

9:05:45 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative DeLena Johnson, Co-Chair
Representative Julie Coulombe
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Alyse Galvin
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Andy Josephson
Representative Dan Ortiz
Representative Will Stapp
Representative Frank Tomaszewski

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Bryce Edgmon, Co-Chair

ALSO PRESENT

Tim Lamkin, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens; Senator James Kaufman, Sponsor; John Crowther, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources; Emma Torkelson, Staff, Senator James Kaufman.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Lisa Boudreau, Director of State Policy, Civics Now, Washington DC; Kelly Manning, Deputy Director, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development; Charlie Lean, Member, Citizens Advisory Commission on Federal Areas, Nome.

SUMMARY

CSSB 29 (FIN)

CIVICS EDUCATION

CSSB 29 (FIN) was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSSB 34 (FIN)

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMM ON FEDERAL AREAS

CSSB 34 (FIN) was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSSB 91 (FIN)

TELEHEALTH: MULTIDISCIPLINARY CARE TEAM

CSSB 91 (FIN) was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

CSSB 95 (STA) am

LIC. PLATES: SPECIALTY ORGS/PEACE OFFICER

CSSB 95 (STA) was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

CSSB 99 (EDC)

FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS

CSSB 99 (STA) was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

CSSB 118 (FIN)

CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCES; REPORTS

CSSB 118 (FIN) was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

SB 228

EXTEND BOARD OF MASSAGE THERAPISTS

SB 228 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the meeting agenda.

[9:07:30 AM](#)

#sb29

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 29 (FIN)

"An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

[9:07:55 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, STAFF, SENATOR GARY STEVENS, introduced SB 29. He relayed that Senator Stevens had been working on the bill for many years. He explained that the bill represented an effort to restore the younger generation's faith and understanding of the government system. The bill called for the creation of a civics curriculum and a required exam or project-based civics assessment for graduating high school seniors. He relayed that Senator Stevens often said that it was a high-stakes issue but would not be a high-stakes test. The goal of the bill was to foster citizenship, voting, and community engagement, which was a fundamental purpose of the public education system. He would provide a brief introduction of the bill but he would be happy to go through the bill in more detail if the committee wished.

Co-Chair Foster asked if the invited testifiers were available.

Mr. Lamkin explained that Ms. Lisa Boudreau represented a national picture of the civics education effort and was available to testify. Also available was former UAS [University of Alaska Southeast] Chancellor John Pugh. He had asked both testifiers to be brief.

Co-Chair Foster noted that Chancellor Pugh was no longer online.

[9:10:05 AM](#)

LISA BOUDREAU, DIRECTOR OF STATE POLICY, CIVICS NOW, WASHINGTON DC (via teleconference), explained that Civics Now was a national coalition focused on strengthening civic education. She opined that Civics Now offered the most promising bipartisan long-term plans with policy recommendations, such as access to more professional development for civics educators and proper assessment for teachers, among several other recommendations. The most important of the policy recommendations was to spend more instructional time on civics in school. Civics education had been neglected over the past 50 years. The Council of Chief State School Officers estimated that 44 percent of districts had cut back on instructional time for social studies over the last 20 years. Studies showed a significant drop in American knowledge of government and basic rights and school test scores had also dropped; however, she was encouraged that there was strong

bipartisan support for improvement. She shared that two-thirds of all voters wanted more civics education in schools.

Ms. Boudreau shared that state legislators had also noticed that there was a problem and 21 measures across 23 different states had been passed in the last two years to improve civics education. In the current legislative session, there were 151 civics education bills in progress across 33 states. She noted that 109 of the bills followed Civics Now's policy recommendations. She explained that SB 29 reflected the national trends and would require students to take a civics course in high school as a graduation requirement paired with either a test or project-based assessment. She urged the committee to support the bill.

[9:12:46 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony.

[9:13:24 AM](#)

Representative Hannan asked how many states had curriculum directives as a statewide effort. For example, she wondered if Alabama oversaw which math curriculums were offered in the state. She relayed that Alaska had 54 school districts and most of the decisions about curriculums were made by the school districts. She clarified that she was looking for a comparison between the number of states that had directives at the state level versus at the district level.

Ms. Boudreau responded that currently, 37 states and Washington D.C. mandated a civics course in high school and curriculum choices were often made at the local level. Some states were involved in helping develop a curriculum, but usually teachers from the community and districts were recruited to help write the curriculum.

Representative Hannan asked if the 37 states had detailed course requirements or simply required a certain number of civics credits to graduate. She asked if other academic subjects were treated similarly.

Ms. Boudreau responded that her expertise was in the civics field and she was unsure about other school subjects.

Mr. Lamkin added that there was a relevant document in committee packets (copy on file) titled "What Other States are Doing." He explained that Alaska's focus was solely on civics education at present.

Representative Hannan asked how many states required government or civics to graduate.

Mr. Lamkin responded that he was aware of only one district with a specific civics requirement.

Representative Hannan asked if government courses were considered civics education.

Mr. Lamkin argued that government courses could also focus on history and not necessarily on projecting public engagement with governance systems. The bill aimed to encourage younger generations to become more engaged in the system of government.

[9:16:46 AM](#)

Representative Josephson asked whether the national efforts to increase civics education were similar to SB 29. He wondered if national efforts also focused attention on communist regimes that suppressed speech but not on right-wing regimes that suppressed speech, like Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime.

Ms. Boudreau responded that the bill sponsor included language on comparative systems of government and addressed the intent of language concerning communist regimes.

Representative Tomaszewski expressed that he was taken aback by Representative Josephson's comments about the right-wing Putin regime. He thought that there had been recent groups of protestors destroying cities in the U.S. who were wearing shirts depicting Fidel Castro. He understood that the shirts were championing people like Castro as good people. Such events showed him that civics education was important because it was crucial to inform young people about how people like Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Castro, and Pol Pot murdered over a hundred million people in the last century and starved their citizens to death.

9:19:00 AM

Representative Ortiz understood that graduating high school seniors would need to pass a test or take a course if the bill were to be adopted. He asked if he could be provided with a copy of the test.

Mr. Lamkin responded that committee packets included a copy of the U.S. immigration test (copy on file) that was given to immigrants seeking U.S. citizenship. He relayed that the civics test would be similar. The test had an 80 percent pass rate amongst prospective immigrants, and he thought the test was straightforward. He clarified that the language of the bill would offer students a choice between taking the written exam that he referenced or completing a project-based assessment that demonstrated engagement in local government.

Representative Ortiz shared that he was a social studies teacher for 32 years and he could appreciate the value of promoting civics understanding amongst young people. He asked whether the course needed to include "civics" in the title or if it could be titled "American Government." He thought that government courses could address similar topics and relayed that in Ketchikan, the high school government course required that students attend local school board meetings or city government meetings. He asked if the course could have a different title and which entity was responsible for determining which courses qualified as civics courses.

Mr. Lamkin responded that he did not think that the senator would object to the course being titled "American Government" or something similar as long as the content of the course fulfilled the civics criteria.

Representative Ortiz asked who would be the gatekeeper determining whether the course fulfilled the requirements of the bill.

Mr. Lamkin responded that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) would develop the curriculum and assessment and districts could use the information. There would be a component on students' transcripts that would indicate whether the course had been completed upon graduation. He relayed that DEED would ultimately have the

responsibility to verify that the course had been passed using the information on the transcripts.

9:23:22 AM

KELLY MANNING, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF INNOVATION AND EDUCATION EXCELLENCE, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION and EARLY DEVELOPMENT, JUNEAU (via teleconference), reviewed the fiscal impact note from DEED with the control code qxpAP. The fiscal note detailed a one-time cost of \$276,000; \$6,000 of which would simply cover the legal fees to update the regulation. The department would convene an educator working group and hire a facilitator to support the department in developing the assessment and curriculum. The department would also review the statewide social studies standards and ensure that the standards were aligned with all of the components in the bill. The upfront cost of the bill would pay for the development of the course and making the course available to districts.

Representative Josephson stated that he has been a history-endorsed teacher since 1991 and took the teaching of history seriously. He was concerned with subsection (b) at the top of page 2 of the bill. He noted that the educational focus of the course was on "admittedly bad" left-wing regimes. He asked if he were teaching under the requirements of the bill, would he be allowed to say that Mao Zedong's predecessor, Chiang Kai-shek, was corrupt and was backed by the United States government. He relayed that Chiang Kai-shek was insensitive to poverty in his country and a revolution began after World War II in response to the situation. He asked if educators would be permitted to provide some context as none of the regimes happened organically. For example, the corrupt Batista regime preceded Fidel Castro's rise to power. He argued that there was a broader story to be told and asked if a teacher would be allowed to tell the entire story.

Mr. Lamkin responded that the committee could spend a lot of time discussing such topics. He did not think that subsection (b) would preclude conversation or criticism of any of the other comparative systems of government or regimes. The subsection was added simply to ensure that the specific topics would be covered in civics education courses. The language of the bill intended to permit discussion of all comparative systems of government used

around the world and would include all regimes and systems of government.

[9:27:29 AM](#)

Representative Josephson remarked that he was originally confused about the language of the subsection because it did not seem consistent with Senator Stevens's principles, but he realized that the bill was a committee substitute from the House Education Committee and the language in subsection (b) did not come from Senator Stevens.

Representative Hannan asked how many of Alaska's 54 school districts already required students to take a government course to graduate.

Ms. Manning responded that she would return to Representative Hannan with the information. She was not aware of DEED collecting such information, but the districts collected the information.

Representative Stapp thought that subsection (b) was a fantastic part of the bill and he did not think it went far enough. He would strike the word "communist" and replace it with the word "Marxist-socialist." All of the regimes listed in the section originated from a Marxist-socialist ideology. He thought it was important for students to understand the weight of the ideology. He argued that the ideology was "catastrophically devastating for the welfare of humankind." He remarked that he was passionate about learning history as well and thought that Representative Josephson's comments about Chiang Kai-shek were unfair given the context of World War II and China's history. He thought it was important for kids to study history.

Representative Stapp continued and asked if the sponsor of the bill would be amenable to adding a document called "The Magyar Struggle" to the list of covered regimes in subsection (b). He explained that the document was published by Joseph Engels and Karl Marx in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, which was a newspaper that explicitly linked Marxist-socialism to ethnic and social hierarchy. He thought that kids should be educated about the impact of Marxist-socialism.

[9:31:22 AM](#)

Representative Galvin remarked that it seemed like the bill was focusing more on history education than on present-day democracy and on educating students on ways to become an engaged citizen. She asked how common it was to require three hours of instruction on Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and other similar figureheads.

Ms. Boudreau responded that it was not a common requirement in civics education legislation. She understood that the House Education Committee added the mandate and it was not part of the original bill.

Representative Galvin asked if there would still be enough time in civics classes to cover other topics if an additional three hours of instruction were included in the curriculum.

Ms. Boudreau responded that she was unable to answer the question and it would be better suited for DEED.

[9:34:12 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline for SB 29 on Thursday, May 9 at 5:00 p.m.

SB 29 was HEARD and HELD for further consideration.

[9:34:31 AM](#)

#sb34

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 34(FIN)

"An Act reestablishing the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska; relating to the membership and duties of the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska; relating to the authority of the Department of Natural Resources regarding the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

[9:35:18 AM](#)

SENATOR JAMES KAUFMAN, SPONSOR, introduced the bill and explained that it would reestablish the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas (CACFA). He understood that the committee had discussed HB 83, which was the companion

bill, and he was prepared to discuss the changes made in the Senate.

Co-Chair Foster suggested that Senator Kaufman give a brief introduction.

Senator Kaufman explained that CACFA was comprised of 10 public members, one senator, and one representative. The commission's role was to represent the views of Alaska's citizens concerning federal land management plans within the state. The commission was responsible for the following: holding hearings to collect public comment on the commission's decisions, disseminating information about old and new regulations to the public, executive branch, and legislature, monitoring the Federal Register, regularly submitting written comments in response to actions that affected Alaska, working proactively with federal agencies to resolve issues, and helping Alaskans navigate federal permitting processes.

Senator Kaufman added that the Senate engaged in substantive committee work over the interim to engage with stakeholders. He relayed that SB 34 differed in four substantive ways from HB 83. The first and second changes added language clarifying that CACFA was housed in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for administrative purposes and that the commission independently determined which issues to take up. The change came about because of concerns that CACFA was operating as just another arm of DNR to supplement ongoing work. He noted that the language also clarified that CACFA and its executive director operated independently of DNR.

Senator Kaufman relayed that the third change established that the ten public non-legislative members must represent all four judicial districts, with no more than three members being from one district. The purpose of the change was to improve the geographic distribution of representation. The fourth change mandated that at least one CACFA seat would be reserved for a member of a federally recognized tribe, and at least one other seat would be reserved for an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) shareholder. The perspective of ANCSA corporations and Alaskan tribes was an invaluable resource to the commission. The tribes and the Alaska Native corporations already worked closely with the federal

government and had insight into federal issues. The final change was updating the effective date to July 1, 2024.

9:38:58 AM

Co-Chair Foster welcomed the visitors watching the committee proceedings in the room.

Representative Josephson shared he had taken a tour of the USS William P. Lawrence vessel and understood that the commander of the ship was present in the committee room.

9:40:07 AM

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

9:40:38 AM

CHARLIE LEAN, MEMBER, CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FEDERAL AREAS, NOME (via teleconference), shared that he was a member of CACFA and was the last acting chair of the body. He was enthusiastic about the changes that would make CACFA independent of DNR; however, the commission would remain dependent on clerical and administrative support due to the available budget. The director of CACFA would be overwhelmed with administrative duties instead of interfacing with the public and the commission itself. He liked the idea of a statewide distribution of members and the inclusion of Alaska Native members. The commission had been effective at speaking with federal land managers and expressing statewide concerns. He thought that having advocates in CACFA to assist with communicating with federal agencies was helpful to the public, but the benefits of CACFA were not fully understood by the public.

9:44:28 AM

JOHN CROWTHER, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, reviewed the fiscal note prepared by DNR with the control code dndrg. There was a projected out-year cost of approximately \$200,000 in operating expenditures which was driven by the additional executive director position. There were associated costs with the addition of the position, such as expanding the workspace and purchasing additional equipment, as well as occasional travel costs.

Co-Chair Foster noted that he would keep public testimony open to allow other testifiers the chance to call in.

Representative Cronk thanked Senator Kaufman for his work. He explained that his constituents were in favor of the bill. The issue was important because there were so many federal areas in the state and utilizing an advisory committee to represent the people was valuable.

[9:46:44 AM](#)

Representative Galvin remarked that she also appreciated the work of the sponsor. She had looked at a past audit and it seemed like the commission was worthwhile and facilitated public understanding and engagement. She asked why there was no duplicity considering the favorable treatment of the commission in the audit.

Senator Kaufman responded that it was due to funding. He explained that the intent was for CACFA to act as a navigator and potentially save the state money by avoiding lawsuits. He thought that if the commission could help the state avoid just one lawsuit, it could recoup more than the cost of the fiscal note in savings.

Co-Chair Foster reminded the public that the House companion bill had been heard by the committee on numerous occasions. He thought that the public might think the process was too quick, but the bill had been heard many times before in various forms.

[9:49:02 AM](#)

Representative Stapp liked the bill and thought the commission should have never been sunsetted. He thought there was not enough understanding of the complexity of land issues and the many different types of overlays of federal land, state land, tribal land, and land belonging to corporations. He thanked the sponsor for bringing the bill forward.

Representative Hannan asked if there had been any discussion about the potential overlap with statehood defense funds that were included in the budgets of both DNR and the Department of Law (DOL). She asked whether CACFA would have access to some of the funds if the funds were needed for litigation purposes.

Senator Kaufman responded that he saw the commission as separate from statehood defense. The commission was intended to act as a navigator and resource for citizens and not as an element of defense. He suggested that his staff could provide more input.

Co-Chair Foster offered clarification that the funds were housed in DOL for court cases.

[9:50:54 AM](#)

EMMA TORKELSON, STAFF, SENATOR JAMES KAUFMAN, responded that when CAFCA made a recommendation to DOL to file a lawsuit, DOL was responsible for choosing whether to file the lawsuit. If a lawsuit was filed, the funds would not come from CACFA. She explained that the commission would not participate in the lawsuit after it made its recommendation. The fiscal note from DNR included \$30,000 in out-years for CACFA to utilize DOL's resources for research purposes. She emphasized that the funds would not be used for lawsuits.

Representative Hannan understood that there was some money made available within DNR to pay for specialists. She asked if there was a potential that the funds could be used for statehood defense and whether DNR had examined the potential intersect. She understood that part of CACFA's purpose was to prevent situations that would require that the state use statehood defense funds, but she wanted to ensure that the funds were available if needed. She asked if there was any funding set aside for defense purposes.

Mr. Crowther responded that DNR understood that the role of the commission was to support information sharing with the public and to receive information from the public about priority issues. He remarked that it was important for the department to understand the issues that were the highest priority to the public and it was beneficial for a formal commission to be able to receive, process, and deliver the information to the proper facilities.

Senator Kaufman thanked the committee for its time and was grateful for the collaborative work that had been done on the bill, particularly by Ms. Torkelson.

[9:53:17 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline of Thursday, May 9 at 5:00 p.m. He expressed his intention to recess the meeting and return if possible. [note: the meeting never reconvened].

[Public testimony for SB 34 was CLOSED during the House Finance Committee meeting scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on 5/8/24.]

SB 34 was HEARD and HELD for further consideration.

[9:55:57 AM](#)

RECESSED

#

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:56 a.m.