

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

February 28, 2023

1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Stanley Wright, Chair
Representative Laddie Shaw
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Cliff Groh
Representative Andrew Gray

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 4

Honoring the Alaska-Korea relationship; and celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea, the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, and the 120th anniversary of the first Korean immigration to the United States.

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 76

"An Act relating to pay for the Alaska State Defense Force; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HJR 4

SHORT TITLE: HONORING THE ALASKA-KOREA RELATIONSHIP

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MINA

02/08/23	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/08/23	(H)	MLV, STA
02/28/23	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 76

SHORT TITLE: PAY FOR AK DEFENSE FORCE
SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/15/23 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/15/23 (H) MLV
02/28/23 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HJR 4.

SEUNG MAN SANG, Consul/Head
Korean Consulate
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HJR 4.

CRAIG CHRISTENSON, Deputy Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
JBER, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Joined for discussion on behalf of the Alaska State Defense Force in support of HB 76.

BOB ERNISSE, Director
Division of Administrative Services
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
JBER, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Joined for discussion on behalf of the Alaska State Defense Force in support of HB 76.

SIMON BROWN, Brigadier General
Alaska State Defense Force
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
JBER, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Joined for discussion on behalf of the Alaska State Defense Force in support of HB 76.

ACTION NARRATIVE

1:00:13 PM

CHAIR STANLEY WRIGHT called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Representatives Shaw, Rauscher, and Wright were present at the

call to order. Representatives Sadler, Groh, Carpenter, and Gray arrived as the meeting was in progress.

The committee took an at-ease from 1:00 p.m. to 1:01 p.m.

HJR 4-HONORING THE ALASKA-KOREA RELATIONSHIP

[1:01:58 PM](#)

CHAIR WRIGHT announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 4, Honoring the Alaska-Korea relationship; and celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea, the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, and the 120th anniversary of the first Korean immigration to the United States.

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REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HJR 4. She explained that the joint resolution commemorates many different anniversaries, but the significant focus in 2023 is on the relationship between Korea and Alaska. The proposed joint resolution commemorates not only the seventieth anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea but also the seventieth anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement which came forth upon the ending of the Korean War. The resolution also acknowledges and celebrates the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of the first Korean immigration to the U.S. She noted that during the Korean War, over 1.8 million American troops fought, including over 2,500 Alaskans, and the resolution honors much of this service between South Korea and the U.S. in terms of military cooperation. She said that the State of Alaska plays a pivotal role in Korean relations due to the proximity to the Korean peninsula.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA noted that the Republic of Korea Air Force participates in exercise RED FLAG-Alaska, which is a joint aerial combat training exercise held by the U.S. Air Force and additionally, last year, Korean Navy ships arrived in Anchorage, Alaska, for the first time as part of the Republic of Korea Navy cruise training. She stressed the "great relationship" between the two countries' militaries. Regarding economic partnership, South Korea is Alaska's strongest trade partner, and she noted

the various items that are traded. Over 7,000 Korean Americans live in Alaska, run small businesses, and are community leaders. There are many churches in Anchorage and many festivals celebrating the Alaska and Korea relationship.

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CHAIR WRIGHT noted he had been aboard a Republic of Korea naval ship, and being a fellow Seaman, commended them on keeping a "clean ship." He invited questions from the committee.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification whether the U.S. and Korea currently stand at an armistice, but not a formal ending to the Korean War. He further commented it is important to maintain good relations in case things should "heat up again."

REPRESENTATIVE MINA deferred the question to Seung Man Sang.

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SEUNG MAN SANG, Consul/Head, Korean Consulate, explained that the Korean War ended with a cease fire agreement in 1953, but a peace treaty is required to formally end the war. The countries are still in the "war situation" in legal terms.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER stated he would like to hear more from Mr. Sang about the value of HJR 4 and what it means to his country.

MR. SANG responded that in addition to all the things Representative Mina had already covered here, it is a milestone in looking back at relations, and it would be honorable and symbolic to acknowledge U.S. and Korea's long-standing and special relationship and continue to develop relationships into the future.

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MR. SANG began his testimony. He explained he would like to speak briefly on the Korea/U.S. and Korea/Alaska relationship. He stressed the importance of remembering the Korean War he referred to as the "forgotten war," and that the Korean War is the starting point for U.S. and Korea alliance. He also noted that Korea has transformed from an aid recipient to an aid giver

for the first time in history, and he expressed his belief that this shows that the U.S. and Korea alliance is one of the most successful ones in the world. He explained that in 2012, the countries entered into a Free Trade Agreement that contributed considerably to the economies of each country, and a 10-year anniversary was celebrated last year.

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MR. SANG emphasized that Korean air cargo carriers are still operating at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, and he reiterated Korea's participation in RED FLAG-Alaska, as noted by Representative Mina. All things considered, he urged the committee to [support] HJR 4.

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CHAIR WRIGHT thanked Mr. Sang and invited questions from the committee.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY expressed surprise that the first Korean immigrants were in 1903, and questioned the reason why there were none before then.

MR. SANG replied that in 1903, about 102 Korean farmers immigrated to Hawaii under a "contract base," and this led up to the immigration to the U.S.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked if there are any other states honoring this year's anniversary.

MR. SANG replied other states are considering the resolution.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER recalled his travels to Korea during its National Day when all the sirens went off and civil defense drills were taken, and he realized the risk under which the Republic of Korea exists. He spoke about the benefit and necessity of international treaties that allow countries to exist in peace and create an umbrella security to which economic relationships can prosper. He asked Mr. Sang where he sees the economic relationship going between Korea and Alaska.

MR. SANG replied that since 2018, Korea had been the largest trading partner with Alaska, and Alaska has huge potential in terms of natural resources. Currently, the items of trade between Korea and Alaska are the marine products, but this can be expanded. He requested a platform be installed to discuss trade cooperation and promotion between Korea and Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER mentioned the possible importation and storage of carbon dioxide (CO2).

MR. SANG expressed keen interest in the carbon industry and felt Representative Saddler's ideas would be "in the right direction."

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MR. SANG, in response to Representative Rauscher, offered his understanding that the armistice agreement was signed in 1953 by North Korea, China, and the United States.

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CHAIR WRIGHT opened public testimony on HJR 4. After ascertaining there was no one who wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

CHAIR WRIGHT announced that HJR 4 was held over.

[1:27:39 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:27 p.m.

HB 76-PAY FOR AK DEFENSE FORCE

[1:28:33 PM](#)

CHAIR WRIGHT announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 76, "An Act relating to pay for the Alaska State Defense Force; and providing for an effective date."

[1:28:49 PM](#)

CRAIG CHRISTENSON, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, stated the discussion would be around removing a statement from current statute. He provided an explanation of the Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF) and its being part of Alaska's Organized Militia, but said that if ASDF

are brought in for training, currently there is no mechanism to pay the members like the other members of state organized militia. He stressed this is not about paying members for drill, but for uncommon instances.

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CHAIR WRIGHT asked if this would be "mission critical" to have this training, and if so, why?

MR. CHRISTENSON brought up an example referencing water purification - the systems required being unique - and he said if a large storm took out communication, ASDF may be the only means of communication and assistance in rural villages. Training is key to all of that.

[1:35:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SHAW pointed out the white paper having a request for \$2.1 million, but the fiscal note is zero. [Both documents are included in the committee packet.]

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that the white paper referenced the budget requests. He referred the question to Mr. Ernisse.

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BOB ERNISSE, Director, Division of Administrative Services, Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, replied that HB 76 doesn't ask for additional funding, but is asking for the opportunity to pay members when they are in training or volunteer status.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked whether there is any drill pay.

MR. CHRISTENSON replied unless they are placed on state active duty for an event such as a disaster, everything is volunteer. The bill does include a provision for drill pay.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked if this is analogous to National Guard Title 32 orders.

MR. CHRISTENSON replied yes, ASDF could always do training in a volunteer status and that would allow them to be paid for the training.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted it may be helpful for a brief overview of the Alaska State Defense Force to be given to the public.

MR. CHRISTENSON informed the committee that Mr. Brown is in the audience and asked that he come up and speak. He provided a brief introduction to Mr. Brown.

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SIMON BROWN, Brigadier General, Alaska State Defense Force, directed his reply to Representative Saddler. He explained that ASDF was originally the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG) and its responsibility at the time was to guard the entire coastline of Alaska with approximately 6,000 members. Now known as the Alaska State Defense Force, the primary responsibilities are to respond to emergencies throughout the state and the majority are not state declared emergencies; they are in small communities and an example is Typhoon Merbok in 2022. He explained there are ground forces present throughout the small communities, and their familiarity with the area and citizens give them the ability to respond immediately.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked what the total enrollment membership is and how they are distributed.

BRIGADIER GENERAL BROWN replied approximately 200 at this time and his goal is to have 5-person teams in communities throughout the state.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER referred to the language on page 1 of the bill and asked for clarification on the training portion.

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MR. CHRISTENSON replied that currently in statute, the Alaska Naval Militia, the Air National Guard, and the Army National Guard can be paid for any state active duty, but it does not cover community service - this being why ASDF is trying to remove the exemption.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER observed that is a very specific carve-out and asked why that specific exemption was included for training and community service in the first place.

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that he does not know the reason, but it was decades ago.

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REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER pointed out the fiscal note being indeterminate, and it is unclear how many people would be activated and the number of times. He inquired if administrative or ceremonial functions qualify for active service.

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that community events such as parades are not considered for paid state active duty.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER stated he was thinking about the processing and headquarter elements that go with bringing new recruits into an organization, and he asked whether these administrative functions qualify for state active duty.

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that the intent was not to bring people into state active duty to do routine paperwork. This state active duty request is specifically for more specialized training.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER acknowledged that HB 76 illuminates the prohibition of payment for training, which had been explained, but asked for a description of the community service portion.

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that an example of community service could be traffic management at large events such as an air show.

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REPRESENTATIVE GROH stated that he saw the structure of ASDF Mr. Christenson had laid out, and he questioned where the headquarters are located and if there are any personnel in his hometown of Anchorage.

BRIGADIER GENERAL BROWN replied that battalion headquarters are located in Wasilla, Alaska, the scout brigade headquarters are in Bethel, Alaska, and the sustainment brigade is in Kodiak, Alaska. He stated some of his staff reside in Anchorage, Alaska.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY referenced back to a former statement that volunteers do not get paid for drill, and asked how often they drill.

MR. BROWN replied they drill two days every month.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked whether [the proposed bill] would authorize pay for drill.

MR. CHRISTENSON responded that drill is considered training; however, there would be a significant fiscal note and a budget ask so the intention is not for drill itself to be paid.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked if the intention is to pay for "special training" and not drill.

MR. CHRISTENSON relayed that the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA) felt it best to leave the options open and not limit the type of training. The department also does not have a fiscal note to pay for drill - but rather that it would allow pay for training.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER wanted clarification for the record that the bill does not seek to provide payment to ASDF members for the two day per month drill, and that ASDF members do not qualify for retirement.

MR. CHRISTENSON confirmed that is correct - ASDF members are eligible only for worker's compensation according to statute, but not eligible for retirement or any other typical state benefits.

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CHAIR WRIGHT opened public testimony on HB 76. After ascertaining there was no one who wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

CHAIR WRIGHT announced HB 76 was held over.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:57 p.m.