

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 21, 2024

3:03 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Laddie Shaw, Chair  
Representative Stanley Wright, Vice Chair  
Representative Ben Carpenter  
Representative Craig Johnson  
Representative Jamie Allard  
Representative Ashley Carrick  
Representative Andi Story

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Lieutenant Governor

Major General Torrence Saxe - Eagle River

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Alaska Police Standards Council

Dusty Dumont - Juneau  
Ron Dupee - Fairbanks  
Jeffrey Brown - Utqiagvik

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Alcohol Beverage Control Board

Janice Hill - Haines  
Diane Thompson - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Marijuana Control Board

Bailey Stuart - Wasilla

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

State Board of Parole

Richard "Ole" Larson - Wasilla

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Personnel Board

Donald Handeland - Eagle River

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Violent Crimes Compensation Board

Anna Cometa - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MAJOR GENERAL TORRENCE SAXE, Appointee

Lieutenant Governor

Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the position of Lieutenant Governor.

DUSTY DUMONT, Appointee

Alaska Police Standards Council

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

JEFFREY BROWN, Appointee

Alaska Police Standards Council

Utqiagvik, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

RON DUPEE, Appointee

Alaska Police Standards Council

Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

JANICE HILL, Appointee  
Alcohol Beverage Control Board  
Haines, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Alcohol Beverage Control Board

DIANE THOMPSON, Appointee  
Alcohol Beverage Control Board  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Alaska Beverage Control Board.

BAILEY STUART, Appointee  
Marijuana Control Board  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Marijuana Control Board

RICHARD "OLE" LARSON, Appointee  
State Board of Parole  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the State Board of Parole.

DONALD HANDELAND, Appointee  
Personnel Board  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Personnel Board.

ANNA COMETA, Appointee  
Violent Crimes Compensation Board  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke as appointee to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board.

LYNNETTA MARCELLUS, representing self  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the appointment of Major General Saxe to the position of Lieutenant Governor.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:03:03 PM](#)

**CHAIR LADDIE SHAW** called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. Representatives Wright, Allard, and Chair Shaw were present at the call to order. Representatives Story, C. Johnson, Carrick, and Carpenter arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :**

**Lieutenant Governor**

**Alaska Police Standards Council**

**Alcohol Beverage Control Board**

**Marijuana Control Board**

**State Board of Parole**

**Personnel Board**

**Violent Crimes Compensation Board**

[3:03:38 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW announced that the only order of business would be the confirmation hearing on the governor's appointees to various boards and commissions.

[3:04:25 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW stated that Alaska Statute (AS) 44.19.040 directs the governor to appoint from among administration officers a successor to the lieutenant governor, subject to confirmation in joint legislative session. The person appointed to succeed the lieutenant governor must meet the qualifications of the Office of Lieutenant Governor and Governor. He asked the appointee to confirm that he is at least 30 years of age.

[3:05:20 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL TORRENCE SAXE, Appointee, Lieutenant Governor, in response to Chair Shaw, confirmed that he is over 30 years old, has been a citizen of the United States for at least 7 years, is qualified to vote in the State of Alaska, and has been a resident of Alaska for at least 7 years. He described his experience through various ranks of the armed forces, including

seven active-duty commands in the army. He has been in the National Guard since 2004 where he was the base commander. He explained that he is the current commissioner of the Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs. He said he has spent much of his time in the Interior and has been to every base in the state. He currently resides in Eagle River.

[3:06:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked about Major General Saxe's vision for election integrity.

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE explained his plan to sit down with Carol Beecher from the Division of Elections to ensure a good working relationship. He noted that he is familiar with protocol and procedures and emphasized the importance of transparency.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD noted that the chief of the National Guard is looking to cut 88 jobs. She asked how the appointee would address this issue.

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE said that this issue has been addressed and he has a meeting with the director of the Air National Guard soon. He explained that the National Guard within Alaska is different from other states. He has met with many elected officials as well as the Alaska Federation of Natives about this issue. He emphasized the strategic importance of Alaska for the safety of the entire continent.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD noted the strategic importance of Alaska's location. She mentioned an issue within the Alaska National Guard regarding pay and asked how the appointee has addressed this issue.

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE remarked that as a lieutenant he learned that time off and pay are two aspects not to be addressed flagrantly. He noted the thousands of pay issues that were present at the start of his tenure. He noted vast improvements have been made since he was put in charge. He explained how pay issues are dealt with among pay clerks and the chain of command.

[3:10:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether there have been challenges with housing for new recruits.

MAJOR GENERAL TORRENCE SAXE said he is working with the Office of Veterans Affairs. He noted issues with housing in Anchorage and Fairbanks. He mentioned that most of his troops already live in state.

REPRESENTATIVE WRIGHT mentioned that he admired the appointee's leadership skills.

[3:12:29 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Major General Torrence Saxe, Lieutenant Governor.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[Public testimony for the appointment of Major General Saxe was taken at the end of the confirmation hearings.]

[3:13:01 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:13 p.m. to 3:14 p.m.

[3:14:44 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW stated that the Alaska Police Standards Council is established by AS 18.65.130 under the Department of Public Safety with the primary mission of establishing minimum standards for employment as well as conduct education and training for the state's public safety and criminal justice officers. The secondary mission of the council is to encourage the establishment of preliminary training programs for persons seeking to become public safety employees. He announced that the committee will review the reappointments of three individuals to the council starting with Ms. Dusty Dumont. He asked the appointee to provide her background and experience.

[3:15:46 PM](#)

DUSTY DUMONT, Appointee, Alaska Police Standards Council, provided her experience and mentioned that she is the director of the Division of Pretrial, Probation and Parole (DPPP) and has worked for the Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) for 21

years and has 26 years of experience working in corrections overall. She discussed her experience as a parole officer. She mentioned that she was born and raised in Juneau, went to college in Ohio where she studied criminal justice. After graduating, she worked in a Washington State penitentiary for about 5 years. She was a stay-at-home parent for her children for 5 years. She explained that becoming a parent helped to prepare her to be a successful probation officer who is firm, fair, and consistent with compassion and empathy. Her experience as the director of DPPP has helped her to gain a statewide perspective of corrections and law enforcement throughout Alaska. She sees the appointment to the Police Standards Council as an honor and a privilege. She stated her belief that her values and personality align with the mission of the council.

[3:18:17 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW commented about the importance of compatible personalities among council members.

[3:18:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked Ms. Dumont to share her experience on the board and what challenges she has faced.

MS. DUMONT remarked that her experience thus far on the board has involved taking in a lot of new content. She expressed how much she has enjoyed learning from her colleagues. She has observed the need for training statewide and emphasized that small communities don't always have the opportunity to have consistent and ongoing training. She highlighted that repetition is essential for robust training.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked her to elaborate about what types of training would be helpful.

MS. DUMONT explained that dramatic changes have occurred through the years. She described the increased utilization of de-escalation and communication skills as opposed to force.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked about the "crisis now" model and how it interacts with police training.

MS. DUMONT expressed her excitement for the "crisis now" model and mentioned that she is attending a meeting about it next week in Kenai. She emphasized that peer support is important to

promote. The addition of mental health clinicians along with peer support will be helpful for people who are in crisis in the field.

3:22:53 PM

CHAIR SHAW mentioned that he was the former director of the Alaska Police Standards Council and emphasized the responsibility involved. He highlighted the importance of keeping up to date with training.

3:23:45 PM

JEFFREY BROWN, Appointee, Alaska Police Standards Council, Alaska Police Standards Council, provided his background and discussed his 24 years of law enforcement experience. He discussed his work at the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in the Office of Professional Standards. He worked as an administrative investigator and later became a supervisor. He moved up to the North Slope Borough where he became the chief of police. He mentioned that he was looking forward to continuing to serve on the board. He emphasized the importance of keeping standards up to date.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked the appointee to share something he's proud of since he started on the Alaska Police Standards Council. He also asked him to share an example of an aspect that needs continued improvement.

MR. BROWN said he was proud of how the council faced the ongoing challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic. He said that he wants to work towards changing policy to make it possible to dispend or temporarily hold certification status of police officers as a mitigation measure for the safety of Alaskans.

3:27:34 PM

RON DUPEE, Appointee, Alaska Police Standards Council, described his law enforcement career, which began in 1999. He discussed his work with the Department of Public Safety in Unalaska. In 2005, he moved back to Fairbanks where he worked through the ranks to become chief of police. He said he was appointed to the board upon the retirement of a board member and mentioned that he has had only a limited time on the board thus far. He emphasized his excitement to return to the board, if approved.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked what Mr. Dupee is hoping to work on and any challenges he's experienced so far in his time on the board.

MR. DUPEE emphasized the importance of the board having the ability to suspend officer certifications. Currently, the board can only fully revoke certifications. He discussed the issue of recruitment and retention of qualified police officers due to changes in retirement benefits. He also discussed the recent marijuana legalization in Alaska and how it impacts police officers in the state.

[3:30:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked Mr. Dupee what strategies the appointee would use to improve interpersonal communication among police officers.

MR. DUPEE described several training classes including "Verbal Judo," which are available to officers with refresher courses every year. Providing training for law enforcement officers is important statewide.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked if the Alaska Police Standards Council has discussed communication improvements during his time of service.

MR. DUPEE mentioned that he has only been to two of the meetings so far. He said that communication is an agenda item that several members are interested in bringing forward.

[3:33:52 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW mentioned that he and the appointee have a mutual colleague.

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Dusty Dumont, Ron Dupee, and Jeffrey Brown, Alaska Police Standards Council.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[3:34:14 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:34 p.m. to 3:36 p.m.

3:36:18 PM

CHAIR SHAW said the Alcohol Beverage Control Board is established by AS 04.06.010 under the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development to oversee the state's policies regarding the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcoholic beverages in the state. He announced that the committee would review the reappointment of two individuals to that board, Janice Hill of Haines and Diane Thompson of Anchorage. He asked the appointees to provide their qualifications and experience.

3:36:52 PM

JANICE HILL, Appointee, Alcohol Beverage Control Board, Haines, Alaska, mentioned that she is a lifelong resident of Haines. She described her experience serving her community including serving as Mayor of Haines for four terms. She described her service on the Alaska Native Health Board, which began the Title IV rewrite of Alaska Statutes for Alcoholic Beverages. Three years ago, she was informed of an opening on the Alaska Beverage Control Board and was pleased to be appointed so that she could continue working on the Title IV rewrite that she had started. She currently serves on the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) Board, and many other boards and committees in the region.

3:39:27 PM

CHAIR SHAW asked if the appointee holds a wholesale alcoholic beverage license.

MS. HILL answered no.

CHAIR SHAW asked if the appointee is an officer, agent, or employee of a wholesale alcoholic beverage enterprise.

MS. HILL replied no.

CHAIR SHAW asked if she or a family member has any financial interest in a business for which a license is issued.

MS. HILL answered no.

CHAIR SHAW asked if she holds any other state or federal office.

MS. HILL answered, no.

[3:40:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked Ms. Hill to comment about the Title IV rewrite process and the benefits she's seen since the changes have taken place.

MS. HILL made note of business hour extensions for tasting rooms to 9:00 p.m. She said she has received a lot of positive feedback about the extra hour. She said she found it interesting to learn what it takes to change and make state statute.

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked what she hopes to see from the Alcohol Beverage Control Board in the future.

MS. HILL described her hope to attend meetings in person and get to know the other board members. She said that she hopes to bring her unique perspective as a person from a small community.

[3:42:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER observed on the appointee's resume that she is a small business owner and asked for more details.

MS. HILL mentioned that she no longer has her small business, which was a bead and jewelry store that she ran for about six years.

[3:43:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked the appointee to elaborate on projects she's looking forward to working on.

MS. HILL said that she is looking forward to reviewing feedback and listening to the public input about changes needed. She expressed her excitement about how businesses are getting involved with the licensing process. She commented that business owners can make a vested impact.

CHAIR SHAW asked the next appointee to provide her qualifications and experience.

[3:45:39 PM](#)

DIANE THOMPSON, Appointee, Alcohol Beverage Control Board, described her experience on the Alcohol Beverage Control Board and expressed her excitement to continue working on the board. She discussed the positive changes to the Title IV rewrite. She noted her background in the restaurant business for the last 40 years. She said that her board membership has offered her great experience and perspective about what is going on around the state outside of Anchorage. She said the board works well together and that she was looking forward to another three years on the board.

CHAIR SHAW asked the appointee if she holds a wholesale alcoholic beverage license.

MS. THOMPSON answered, no.

CHAIR SHAW asked the appointee if she is an officer, agent, or employee of a wholesale alcoholic beverage enterprise.

MS. THOMPSON responded no.

CHAIR SHAW asked if she holds any state or federal office.

MS. THOMPSON answered no.

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Janice Hill and Diane Thompson, Alcohol Beverage Control Board.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[3:47:58 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:47 p.m. to 3:49 p.m.

[3:49:53 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW said the Marijuana Control Board is established by AS 17.38.080 under the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development to oversee the state's policies regarding the manufacture, distribution, and sale of marijuana in the state. The committee will review the appointment of Bailey

Stuart of Wasilla, Alaska to that board. He asked the appointee to provide her qualifications and experience.

[3:50:30 PM](#)

BAILEY STUART, Appointee, Marijuana Control Board, described her experience and mentioned that she is the owner of cannabis retail stores in Wasilla and Palmer and founded the first approved cannabis retailer in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. She said that she is also an adjunct professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage where she teaches and has developed its cannabis curriculum. She serves on the Alaska Marijuana Industry Association Board as the chair of the public relations and governance committee. She explained that she possesses a comprehensive understanding of Alaska's regulations regarding cannabis. She said that she cares about the future vitality of the industry in the state and is honored to have the opportunity to serve the industry.

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Bailey Stuart, Marijuana Control Board.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[3:52:01 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:52 p.m. to 3:54 p.m.

[3:54:07 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW said the Alaska Board of Parole is established by AS 33.16.020 under the Department of Corrections to serve as the parole authority of the state and to consider the suitability for parole of a prisoner who is eligible for discretionary parole or special medical parole. He said the House State Affairs Standing Committee will review the reappointment of Richard Larson of Wasilla. He asked the appointee to provide his qualifications and experience.

[3:54:42 PM](#)

RICHARD "OLE" LARSON, Appointee, Alaska Board of Parole, stated that he holds a bachelor's degree in biology and is a certified high school science teacher. He served in the Department of Corrections in many capacities since 1980 and retired in 2005. He described his time on the Matanuska-Susitna School Board. He said he was appointed to the State Board of Parole in 2010 and served two five-year terms. After his second term, he worked to audit correction facilities throughout the country that housed undocumented immigrants.

[3:56:48 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW said that one of those criteria listed in AS 33.16.030(c) is that no member of the board may be an officer or employee of the state. He asked the appointee to confirm that he is not an officer or employee of the state.

MR. LARSON confirmed that he is not presently an officer or employee of the state.

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked about Mr. Larson's goals for the parole board and what the biggest challenges facing parolees in Alaska currently are.

MR. LARSON mentioned his goal to educate students so they "don't have idle time to fall into the pitfalls of drugs and alcohol." He said that 85 percent of offenders have drug or alcohol issues. He mentioned a goal to get more substance abuse treatment within correctional facilities. He emphasized the importance of releasing people from corrections that have shown improvements from when they were admitted through additional treatment. The goal for those who are being released from prison is that they can work fulltime and have the tools to break negative cycles of drugs and alcohol.

[3:59:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK expressed appreciation for the appointee's emphasis on prevention. She asked about challenges for those who are on parole.

MR. LARSON responded that many long-term parolees have a hard time finding work. Hiring felons is not common. The department is starting to provide training and education in the trades for incarcerated individuals. Employment, drugs, and alcohol are significant challenges for parolees.

[4:02:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked Mr. Larson to share his thought process regarding granting discretionary parole.

MR. LARSON offered to follow up with a thumb drive with 57 files that cover the offenders' criminal history and record through the Alaska Corrections Offender Management System (ACOMS). He explained how he becomes thoroughly briefed on each offender, takes note of work, rehabilitation programs, history of juvenile detention, and education to determine what they need. He listed many factors that are considered for discretionary parole including whether the parolee has taken initiative, gotten work, continues substance abuse counseling, and has come up with a solid release plan. Another important factor he mentioned was victim's rights. Deliberations occur after a 30-minute interview with the parolee.

[4:05:23 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked about recidivism rates.

MR. LARSON explained that discretionary parole is a rare privilege and generally they do not reoffend. He described parolees with success stories. He said that the key to parolee success is finding work and discontinuing drug and alcohol use.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked how Mr. Larson felt about his success record. He asked the appointee how many cases he has regretted granting discretionary parole.

MR. LARSON said that over the last 12 years only a couple "went south." He explained that each year there are hundreds of cases, and about 20 percent are discretionary cases. He said the board does an excellent job and many discretionary parolees eventually come back and petition for early termination from parole.

[4:11:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked about parole board training.

MR. LARSON said that generally parole board members attend a week-long course through the National Institute of Corrections. Training with attorneys is also held to learn about the legality of the parole process. He emphasized that experience is the best way to receive training. He said that during his time

working for the Department of Corrections, he took eight to ten different National Institute of Corrections college accredited courses to prepare for parole board membership. He stated his goal to prevent there being any more victims. Keeping the community safe is what the board strives for.

[4:14:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked if there is a standard of assessment for parole boards.

MR. LARSON discussed the copious statistics generated by the parole board. He said that the grant rate was low when he came back to **the parole board** because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of the Palmer Correctional Center. He stated that the grant rate has increased since. He said he wasn't sure of how Alaska ranked nationally regarding parolee outcomes. He mentioned that every state does parole differently especially in states with larger populations. In Alaska, there are five board members, which is adequate, and they work well together.

[4:17:17 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW asked the committee to focus on the appointee's qualifications.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked if parole board decisions are generally unanimous.

MR. LARSON said that generally decisions are unanimous. He said that the board tends to lean more towards granting parole. The board also looks at seriousness of the crime and whether granting discretionary parole would diminish the seriousness of the crime. He described two murder cases, one which was pre-meditated versus another which was a crime of passion. Victims are also considered.

[4:21:17 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW said that one of the criteria listed in AS 33.16.030(c) is that no member of the board may be an officer or employee of the state. He asked the appointee to confirm that he is not an officer or employee of the state.

MR. LARSON confirmed he is not.

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following name be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Richard Larson, State Board of Parole.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[4:21:54 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:21 p.m. to 4:23 p.m.

[4:23:43 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW said that the Personnel Board is established by AS 39.25.060 under the Department of Administration to achieve the purposes of the Public Employment Relations Act and to provide policy, consultive guidance, and direct human resources services to the State of Alaska Executive Branch Agencies. Today the House State Affairs Standing Committee will review the appointment of Donald Handeland of Eagle River to that board. He asked the appointee to provide his qualifications and experience.

[4:24:22 PM](#)

DONALD HANDELAND, Appointee, Personnel Board, explained that he is an engineer. He mentioned his involvement in the Alaska Commission of Post-Secondary Education. He has been a member of the Personnel Board since 2023.

CHAIR SHAW asked if the appointee is currently an employee of the State of Alaska.

MR. HANDELAND answered no.

[4:25:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD commented that she can vouch for the appointee's experience. She asked the appointee what he would like to accomplish on the Personnel Board.

MR. HANDELAND mentioned that he is new to the board compared to the other board members. As a younger member, he is hoping to take some time to get up to speed and learn.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked what he will bring to the Personnel Board with his experience.

MR. HANDELAND replied that he has served on other boards in the past. He mentioned that he has a Master of Business Administration from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks and possesses some business experience.

[4:28:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked how long Mr. Handeland has been on the board.

MR. HANDELAND answered that he started on the board in October 2023.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked the appointee to list boards on which he has served.

MR. HANDELAND replied that he was appointed to the Alaska Commission of Post Secondary Education as the public member in 2021. He has also been on the Alaska Student Loans Corporation Board of Directors since 2022. He mentioned he was briefly on the State Officers Compensation Commission. As a student he served as a student board member for the State Board of Education and Early Development.

[4:29:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked the appointee to describe his experience with overseeing employees.

MR. HANDELAND explained that as a student, he was a supervisor of a few employees at the Mt. Edgecomb High School snack bar. As an engineer, he works with engineers in training.

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK noted that Mr. Handeland appears to be politically active according to his resume. She asked if being politically active during campaign season would infringe on his ability to serve on the board.

MR. HANDELAND responded that he would refrain from working on campaigns that are directly related to the executive branch. He stated that he doesn't currently have plans to volunteer with political campaigns.

[4:32:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON mentioned his personal experience on the Personnel Board. He clarified that the board handles complaints, approves the reclassification of jobs, and serves as the ethics committee for the governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general. He remarked that the staff that work for the Personnel Board are fantastic. He noted that he ran for office while simultaneously serving on the board. Once he was elected, he could no longer serve on the board. He explained that the Personnel Board is not a political board. Appointees to the Personnel Board should have integrity, be able to listen to attorneys, and be willing to see what is right and wrong. He expressed his hope that the appointee possesses those traits.

MR. HANDELAND commented that he agrees.

[4:35:13 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW asked the appointee if he is currently an employee of the state of Alaska.

MR. HANDELAND answered no.

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following name be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Donald Handeland, Personnel Board.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[4:35:35 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:35 p.m. to 4:37 p.m.

[4:37:20 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW said the last item for the day is the review of the appointment of Anna Cometa to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board. The Violent Crimes Compensation Board was established by AS 18.67.010 with the purpose of facilitating and permitting the payment of compensation to those who have been victims of violent crime. Anna Cometa has been appointed by the governor and this will be her first term. Chair Shaw asked the appointee

to tell the committee about her qualifications, experience, and desire to serve.

[4:37:53 PM](#)

ANNA COMETA, Appointee, Violent Crimes Compensation Board, described her experience working as an attorney around the state with child victims of crime since 2012. Through her experience working at the District Attorney's Office, she served on the Statewide Infant and Child Death Review Panel. She also served on many multidisciplinary teams and task forces aimed at serving victims and families having trouble and children experiencing abuse and neglect. She emphasized her familiarity with the Indian Child Welfare Act. She has served in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley as a magistrate judge. For the past year and a half she has started a private practice and has worked to serve her community in other ways. She said she is a member of the Anchorage Rotary Club, a board member for the Red Cross of Alaska, a trustee of the Anchorage Opera, and has served as the attorney member on the Violent Crimes Compensation Board.

MS. COMETA emphasized that the Violent Crimes Compensation Board is crucial in providing victim advocacy and services that promote recovery and help to mitigate devastation caused by violent crimes in Alaska. The board's work contributes to a culture of respect hope and opportunity for victims of violent crime. She said that the board is currently facing a devastating funding crisis. The board is asking the legislature to consider shifting staff allocation funding to the general fund so that the restorative justice account can be used to adequately fund victims of violent crime.

CHAIR SHAW asked the appointee to return the discussion to her experience and qualifications.

MS. COMETA emphasized that her advocacy reflects her desire to serve on the board to ensure that victims of violent crime are compensated under the statutory scheme.

[4:42:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY commented on the passion in the appointee's voice. She expressed her appreciation for the appointee's explanation of her experiences.

[4:42:26 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW stated that [the House State Affairs Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Anna Cometa, Violent Crimes Compensation Board.] He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[4:42:54 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW opened public testimony on the confirmation hearings for the governor's appointee to various boards and commissions.

[4:43:02 PM](#)

LYNETTA MARCELLUS, representing self, testified in opposition to the appointment of Major General Saxe to Lieutenant Governor. She claimed whistleblower status protection for her husband, a National Guardsman. She described her husband's experience at the National Guard, which has become a "toxic work environment." Her husband was injured during an army combat fitness test and due to the poor management and procedures of the guard, he had to wait three years for his case to be resolved. He spent time accumulating evidence and was administratively evaded repeatedly. He had to use his own medical coverage to deal with the injury. He filed a congressional inquiry through Senator Sullivan to resolve the situation.

MS. MARCELLUS said that since Major General Saxe's command, he has allowed Colonel Michelle Edwards to target soldiers, forcing them to quit and leave the state. She made note of several people that she knew who had retired early because of Colonel Edwards. Colonel Edwards obtained the personal medical records of her husband and shared them with soldiers in his unit and encouraged them to create a complaint against her husband so that he would be removed from his command. She said that Major General Saxe failed to discipline Colonel Edwards and targeted her husband to remove his aeronautical rating.

[4:46:26 PM](#)

MS. MARCELLUS said her husband had to defend himself before the Flight Board and said that military lawyers took advantage of a soldier without law experience to make motions that suppressed evidence and exercised procedural nuances to hinder his defense.

She said that her husband had no one to defend him because Major General Saxe's lawyer had failed to inform the defense attorney when the Flight Board convened. To force her husband into a plea bargain deal, she said Major General Saxe used his staff to threaten him. Her husband tried to defend himself without an attorney to remove the flags on his record, to no avail.

MS. MARCELLUS emphasized that this is not proper protocol and has prevented her husband from taking jobs in other states and has "ruined his military career." She said that Major General Saxe will not let her husband go due to the low manning numbers and the need for his engineering expertise. When her husband asked for a tag release to transfer out of the Alaska National Guard, Major General Saxe refused to sign it. She described several other issues her husband experienced at his civilian job. She said that while her husband was away, Major General Saxe replaced her husband with someone who was willing to sign off on questionable financial transactions. She requested an investigation into Major General Saxe's behavior and urged the committee to reconsider his appointment.

[4:49:20 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[4:49:38 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:49 p.m. to 4:51 p.m.

[4:51:14 PM](#)

CHAIR SHAW provided closing remarks.

[4:51:22 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:51 p.m.