

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

April 24, 2023

3:34 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative CJ McCormick, Chair
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Jamie Allard
Representative Maxine Dibert
Representative Jennie Armstrong

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Sarah Vance
Representative Josiah Patkotak

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE PRESERVATION & ADVISORY COUNCIL

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

X'UNEI LANCE TWITCHELL, PhD, Professor
Alaska Native Languages
University of Alaska Southeast
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council presentation.

YAAYUK BERNADETTE ALVANNA-STIMPFLE, Director
Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:34:19 PM](#)

CHAIR CJ MCCORMICK called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 3:34 p.m. Representatives Carpenter, Dibert, and McCormick were present at the call to order. Representatives Allard and Armstrong arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council

[3:35:08 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the only order of business would be the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council presentation.

[3:36:19 PM](#)

X'UNEI LANCE TWITCHELL, PhD, Professor, Alaska Native Languages, University of Alaska Southeast, introduced himself and his affiliation with the presenting group to the committee.

[3:38:15 PM](#)

YAAYUK BERNADETTE ALVANNA-STIMPFLE, Director, Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program, introduced herself and her affiliation with the presenting group to the committee.

[3:40:40 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL began the presentation via PowerPoint [hardcopy included in the committee packet], on slide 2, which gave a brief description of the history of the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council (ANLPAC) and its official duties as outlined in Alaska Statute (AS) 44.33.520.

[3:44:14 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLE brought attention to slide 3, which listed ANLPAC's achievements since its founding in 2012. She explained that the council has led to a revitalization of all Alaska Native languages, created immersion schools, restored traditional place names, and normalized the speaking and understanding of Alaska Native languages.

[3:51:39 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL moved to slide 4, which displayed an image of an Alaska Native speaker teaching children an Alaska Native language in a classroom with the text "2022 biennial report to the Governor and Legislature" atop the image. He briefly explained what ANLPAC's biennial report entails and what it is meant to achieve.

[3:55:32 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLER brought attention to slide 5, which gave a broad overview of acts of the Alaska Legislature and subsequent Alaska statutes that have had an effect on policies regarding Alaska Native languages.

[3:57:39 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLER said that after 2012, ANLPAC had monthly meetings and work sessions to work to revitalize and restore Alaska Native languages. She said that she didn't realize how endangered the Inupiaq language was and used Alaska Airlines unwillingness to use the name of the town Utqiagvik in place of the previous name Barrow as an example of the stigma often surrounding Alaska Native languages.

[3:59:59 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL spoke to the 1995 Native Language Act, which said that schoolboards in Alaska shall establish a curriculum for Native language education.

[4:02:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD commented that she doesn't know how recommendations are going to work out and said that languages are dying worldwide because elders and seniors are dying.

[4:03:06 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL moved to slide 6, which gave a detailed description of ANLPAC's recommendations of action for the executive branch of Alaska to take in regard to the flourishing of Alaska Native languages.

[4:05:35 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLER continued to slide 7, which gave a detailed description of ANLPAC's recommendations of action for the

legislative branch of Alaska to take in regard to the flourishing of Alaska Native languages.

[4:08:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD referenced the recommendations brought forward by ANLPAC and the presenters to elaborate on the recommendation to establish Alaska Native language standing committees in the Alaska House and the Alaska Senate.

[4:09:52 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL emphasized that the only position of ANLPAC is to forward and benefit Alaska Native Languages. He said that the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs wasn't established at the time of the biennial report being published and it is the council's wish for the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs to be established as a standing committee, not just a special committee.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD said she was unsure if it would be enough to have a committee solely dedicated to Alaska Native language and said that the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs should continue its work on Alaska Native languages.

[4:13:29 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL continued to slide 8, which summarized a second recommendation that ANLPAC made to both the executive and legislative branches of the State of Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked for examples of the principle of decolonization being integrated into Alaska's education system.

DR. TWITCHELL said that education in Alaska is and has been a largely colonial endeavor. He referenced an instance at a student government summit where no one in a room knew who the man William Paul was - someone who had contributed greatly to Alaska Native issues - but everyone knew who Martin Luther King, Jr. was. He said that the Alaska education system wasn't colonial by violence, rather it was colonial by its exclusion of the Alaska Native perspective.

[4:20:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD said that the Alaska Studies classes are rigorous and suggested that students not paying attention is

largely to blame for a person's gap in their knowledge and recognition of Alaska Native people. She referenced her own experience as a light-skinned person of Latina descent and said that it can be difficult when it feels like people don't recognize your ethnicity.

[4:22:28 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL mentioned "place-based education by place-based teachers" and the need to support them with systemic shifts in education.

[4:22:57 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLÉ continued to slide 9, which elaborated on ANLPAC's second recommendation to the executive and legislative branches of Alaska.

[4:23:10 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:23 p.m. to 4:28 p.m.

[4:28:07 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL continued the presentation on slide 9, where he continued to elaborate on ANLPAC's second recommendation of action to the executive and legislative branches.

[4:29:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD referenced the Anchorage School District's language immersion programs and asked whether those were effective in language revitalization.

DR. TWITCHELL said that he has a graphic that outlines the benefits of language immersion programs and said that they are "the most solid way to secure a future" for Alaska Native languages. He said that often language immersion programs are for those who don't actually speak the language and emphasized that a cultural immersion program would better achieve the goals of the council.

[4:32:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked whether there was adequate participation in schools to have an Alaska Native language immersion program.

DR. TWITCHELL answered that there is adequate participation in certain parts of Alaska and used Bethel, Alaska, as an example of a place that has developed Alaska Native language immersion programs and shared specific recommendations as to how to successfully establish more programs similar to it across the state.

[4:35:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD commented that an Alaska Native language immersion program would be best suited for a charter school and shared her belief that public education in Alaska is overfunded.

[4:35:37 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLER moved to slide 10, which listed a series of ANLPAC's policy recommendations to forward and nurture Alaska Native languages in Alaska. She detailed specific points on the list and explained how each one could come to fruition.

[4:41:47 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL added that current statute states that if a majority of students in a school are Alaska Native, a Native language curriculum must be formed.

[4:43:27 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL continued to slide 11, which explained how Alaska Native languages in physical and social places must be normalized as a means to forward and nurture Alaska Native languages. He moved to slide 12, which explained that conscious governmental, community, and personal actions must be made to restore the regular use of Alaska Native languages in as many places as possible.

[4:46:53 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL reassured the committee that although the first recommendation seems daunting, it is possible to achieve, and he elaborated on certain actions that must be taken to do so.

[4:50:23 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ARMSTRONG asked whether ANLPAC had a priority list for Alaska Native place name restoration.

DR. TWITCHELL, in response, advised that a pilot project would be the best method to achieve the goal of Alaska Native place name restoration.

[4:51:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ARMSTRONG commented that she would like to move a bill to re-establish Alaska Native place names in Alaska.

[4:51:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT said there are a lot of creeks near her mother's home simply named "Squaw Creek" and explained how it is her goal to restore Alaska Native place names in place of racist place names.

DR. TWITCHELL explained how each phase of the first recommendation could be achieved and emphasized that Alaska Native place names would not pose a threat to public safety.

[4:53:30 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL moved to slide 13, which emphasized the need to address historical Alaska Native language suppression and trauma as ANLPAC's fourth recommendation of actions to be taken by the executive and legislative branches in Alaska.

[4:54:20 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLER continued to slide 14, which explained how the historical suppression of Alaska Native languages and the associated trauma of that suppression has negatively affected Alaska Native people and shared recommended policy actions to be taken to heal the trauma that Alaska Native people have experienced.

[4:56:08 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL moved to slide 15, which listed the members of ANLPAC and acknowledged its members who were not present at the committee meeting.

[4:56:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT commented that there are many Spanish language immersion programs in Alaska public schools but not nearly as many Alaska Native language immersion programs.

[4:58:04 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL cited Alaska Native corporations as potential funding sources for Alaska Native language immersion programs and emphasized that it is not only up to Alaska Natives to ensure the survival of their languages; a revision of the Alaska language curriculum and a recertification of teachers in Alaska are paramount in the effort to restore and revitalize Alaska Native languages.

[5:01:16 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK shared his experience growing up in Bethel with Yupik classes, media, and public signage and said that it is possible and plausible to have proper Alaska Native language immersion.

[5:03:23 PM](#)

DR. TWITCHELL commented that Bethel and Saint Lawrence Island are successes stories of Alaska Native language preservation and vitalization. He said that 20 of the 23 Alaska Native languages are endangered and emphasized that the state should start to check off each language from the endangered language list.

[5:09:00 PM](#)

MS. ALVANNA-STIMPFLE shared her experience working with her daughter when she was 28 years old and explained how involving elders and community members in her teaching experience made a difference in learning the language. She said that some children are translators for adults who are learning, which she described as an exciting mark of a positive change for the future of Alaska Native languages.

[5:11:56 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK thanked the invited testifiers from ANLPAC and delivered committee announcements.

[5:12:29 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 5:12 p.m.