

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 20, 2023

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman (via teleconference)  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW: UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA EMPOWER ALASKA

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 14

"An Act relating to reemployment of persons who retire under the teachers' retirement system as mentors; relating to retirement incentives for members of the defined benefit retirement plan of the teachers' retirement system and the defined benefit retirement plan of the Public Employees' Retirement System of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 14 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTIONS**

BILL: SB 14

SHORT TITLE: RIP FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES/TEACHERS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) KAWASAKI

01/18/23	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/18/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/23	(S)	EDC, L&C, FIN
02/03/23	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/03/23	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
02/08/23	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/08/23	(S)	Heard & Held

02/08/23 (S) MINUTE (EDC)  
02/10/23 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/10/23 (S) Heard & Held  
02/10/23 (S) MINUTE (EDC)  
02/20/23 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

PAT PITNEY, President  
University of Alaska System  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented an overview of the University of Alaska.

CHAD HUTCHISON, Director  
State Relations  
University of Alaska System  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented an overview of the University of Alaska.

TONIA DOUSAY, Dean  
School of Education  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented an overview of the University of Alaska.

PAUL LAYER, Vice President  
Academic Affairs  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented an overview of the University of Alaska.

DEBORAH CRAIG, Dean  
College of Health  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented an overview of the University of Alaska.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

3:30:34 PM

**CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were

Senators Kiehl, Bjorkman (via teleconference), Gray-Jackson, Stevens, and Chair Tobin.

**SB 14-RIP FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES/TEACHERS**

[3:31:35 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 14 "An Act relating to reemployment of persons who retire under the teachers' retirement system as mentors; relating to retirement incentives for members of the defined benefit retirement plan of the teachers' retirement system and the defined benefit retirement plan of the Public Employees' Retirement System of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

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CHAIR TOBIN recapped that the purpose of SB 14 is to provide a temporary retirement incentive for Alaska public employees and allow school districts to rehire retired educators through a 12-month contract.

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CHAIR TOBIN said there were no amendments and asked if there were any additional comments or questions on SB 14.

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CHAIR TOBIN solicited a motion.

[3:32:34 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report SB 14, work order 33-LS0180\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

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CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and SB 14 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

SENATOR BJORKMAN joined the meeting via teleconference.

[3:32:58 PM](#)

At ease.

**OVERVIEW:**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA EMPOWER ALASKA**

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CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of an overview by the University of Alaska.

[3:35:13 PM](#)

PAT PITNEY, President, University of Alaska System, Anchorage, Alaska, turned to slide 1 and said the university is Alaska's public system of higher education with locations in Anchorage (UAA), Fairbank (UAF), and Southeast Alaska (UAS). UAF is a research university, UAA is a comprehensive university, and UAS is a regional university focusing on southeastern Alaska's economy. Each university offers a unique experience on campus and options that help keep students in the state. An example is the Kenai Peninsula College, with immersive reality simulation equipment for its process tech program. The equipment allows students to complete most of the program through distance learning. Fairbanks has an aviation program for aircraft mechanics, one of seven intensive programs students can complete in one year. The University of Alaska's quality programs allow students to be employed anywhere in the world.

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MS. PITNEY turned to slide 3, UA Priority Focus Areas, and said that following some problematic years, the university needed a focused expedited strategic plan. She spoke to the following points of the dynamic plan stating these are the areas where the university sees growth opportunities:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Increase Student Enrollment through retention in degree programs for Alaska's workforce

Develop Workforce and Focused Economic Development Initiatives

Promote Arctic Policy, Research and Leadership

Strengthen Teacher Education through the Alaska College of Education Consortium

Advance the Alaska Native Success Initiative

Build Finance Industry Partnerships to Expand Business Workforce

Increase Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Presence in Southeast Alaska

Revise Business Models for Efficiency and Modernization

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MS. PITNEY advanced to slide 4, Enrollment Highlights and said 2023 is the first year in nine years that the university is not grappling with major state budget reductions. Focus has come with financial stability, allowing the university to promise it will not cut programs and financial aid. Student confidence is essential for the success of the university. She spoke to the following university highlights:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Spring 2023 Enrollment:

- Headcount up 1 percent over Spring 2022. First year-to-year increase in 10 years.
- Significant enrollment increases at most Community Campuses, the UAA and UAF Community and Technical Colleges and the UAS School of Career Education
- More students in classes and return to face-to-face instruction, but there are more online options for students across the UA system than pre-COVID

Dual enrollment:

- In FY22, more than 2,300 high school students were enrolled in a University course an increase of 10% over FY21.

UA Scholars:

- As of February 1, 48 percent of eligible UA Scholars secured their award by applying to UAA, UAF or UAS an increase of 11% percent over 2022.

Teacher Preparation

- Re-established BA in Early Childhood Education at UAA
- Pilot program to provide financial support for students in teaching internships

Healthcare

- Expansion of the Nursing program
- Pilot program to provide financial support for students in clinical programs

Alaska in the national context

- Fall 2022 enrollments were down 1.9 percent nationwide, and Fall enrollment across UA was similar

- The average debt of University of Alaska graduates and the percentage of graduates with debt is below the national average.

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MS. PITNEY moved to slide 5, Enrollment/Academic Profile - Current as of December 2022, and stated it is a snapshot of where the university is in terms of enrollment and academic profile:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Enrollment is a top priority of the University.  
Providing value and showing what we can do to help  
Alaska.**

**Enrollment\***

- Total Student Headcount - 20,190
- University of Alaska Anchorage - 11,360
- University of Alaska Fairbanks - 7,400
- University of Alaska Southeast - 2,130
- Total Full Time Equivalency - 11,720

**Academic Profile**

- Faculty - 1,875 • Staff - 3,271
- UA Scholars\* - 1,276
- AK Performance Scholars\* - 1,866
- Dual-Enrollment Students\*\* - 2,324
- UA Alumni - 120,000+

\*Data estimates from Fall 2022 as of December 19, 2022

\*\*Data for FY22

MS. PITNEY said tweaking the AK Performance Scholarship by passing SB 56 will make a huge difference in how many students the university will attract. Industry reports reveal that nearly 80 percent of the university's graduates work in Alaska within a year. The Department of Labor reported that 25 percent of students that leave Alaska return long-term. Keeping students in the state is a good strategy for building Alaska's workforce.

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MS. PITNEY turned to slide 6, Importance of Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) and Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF), and stated that through emergency COVID regulation, the university discovered that students who did not take SAT and ACT exams were as successful in their coursework as students who

did. The tests are a financial and place-based burden to students. The University of Alaska awards scholarships to students in August following graduation. She opined that the university should award scholarships to seniors in the fall, so there is certainty about where they will attend college.

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CHAD HUTCHISON, Director of State Relations, University of Alaska System, Fairbanks, Alaska, said HB 31 is the companion bill to SB 56. He said HB 31 would change the monetary values of the scholarships set 10 years ago.

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SENATOR STEVENS said he is concerned about the loss of 1,500 university faculty. He opined that people select a university based on the quality of the faculty. He asked for specifics about the lost faculty and their replacement.

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MS. PITNEY said she did not have precise numbers, but there are roughly 500 fewer faculty members. The loss of over \$100 million of state funding impacted university employees. Rebuilding faculty will occur with financial and program stability. Growth will occur through partnerships. She stated that the university would not return to the way it was. The university will add faculty as enrollment increases and as there are clear program investments through partnerships. The administration made changes to the university based on industry demand. She provided UAA and UAS's partnership to create a master's in fisheries program as an example of how growth made it possible to hire two faculty. She spoke about how the state's investment in the university health programs enabled a pay increase so nursing faculty would not resign in favor of higher-paying jobs in the healthcare industry.

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SENATOR STEVENS said the loss of faculty is not a criticism against President Pitney; she was dealt a bad hand. However, the loss of outstanding faculty is sad. He wished President Pitney the best in working to build a university with a strong faculty.

CHAIR TOBIN stated she agreed.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON said the university had faced many challenges. She asked about faculty and staff morale.

[4:02:12 PM](#)

MS. PITNEY replied that morale is better than it was two years ago. However, employees are still wearing multiple hats. They remember recent difficulties and the loss of staff. It is not easy. Now that the university has a stable footing, it can assess its assets and what it learned from COVID to move forward in a new way. Staff received a slight 2 percent raise, and faculty are negotiating a raise. The university's high vacancy rate is due to retirement and project expansion.

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CHAIR TOBIN stated that she is a doctoral candidate at the UAF.

[4:06:18 PM](#)

TONIA DOUSAY, Dean, School of Education, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska, moved to slide 7 and said she joined her first meeting of the Alaska College of Education Consortium (ACEC) when she became the Dean of the School of Education on July 1, 2022. She spoke to the following points regarding teacher education and provided the dates ACEC meets:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- The University of Alaska College of Education Consortium (ACEC) ensures consistency and communication across the UA education entities, and between UA and Alaska's P12 stakeholders and develops strategies to meet the needs of Alaska's P12 school system. The Consortium has been successful in strengthening the entire UA education program ecosystem and includes:
  - UAA School of Education, UAF School of Education and UAS School of Education: offering a full array of accredited academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level, leading to education licenses, endorsements, certificates, and degrees at the associate, bachelors and master's level.
  - Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) unit at UAA collaborates with partner organizations to provide support for 500-level (professional development) courses, workshops, conferences, institutes, and academies;
  - K12 Outreach office that administers the Alaska Statewide Mentoring Program (ASMP) to assist new

teachers in Alaska's schools, the Alaska Teacher Placement (ATP) office, a statewide education job clearinghouse, and the Educators Rising program, encouraging Alaska's junior and senior high school students to become Alaska's next generation of teachers;

- Center for Alaskan Education Policy Research (CAEPR) at UAA's Institute for Social and Economic Research conducts and disseminates education research, emphasizing topics relevant to Alaskans.
- An ACEC Liaison to work at the system level facilitating internal and external collaboration and communication related to Alaska's P12 education system.

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PAUL LAYER, Vice President, Academic Affairs, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Anchorage, Alaska, stated he appreciates the work UAA is doing to bring back early childhood education.

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SENATOR STEVENS said there is a severe shortage of teachers in Alaska. The state is hiring teachers from other countries because there are so few teachers. Whatever the university can do to address the teacher shortage would be wonderful, and he appreciates all the university's efforts.

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MS. DOUSAY noted that several school districts are employing teachers on M1 visas. Addressing the teacher shortage is a hot topic among school administrators, who are investigating creative ways to resolve the issue.

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MS. DOUSAY moved to slide 8 and said it is part of the university's biennial report to the legislature. The map of Alaska shows the number of UA alumni teaching in each school district. The university and ACEC are working on an eco-system mapping project to provide specific data about partners beyond what is happening with teachers. It will detail what is happening with administrators and partners. It will identify districts that could benefit from a partnership. She stated she is not satisfied with the low percentage of teachers being Alaskan alumni. She said the graph shows that enrollment and graduate numbers are making a comeback. Regular data will help

the university identify where relationships can be strengthened to increase enrollment.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked what the university is doing to reach out to people with some college but still needing a degree.

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MS. DOUSAY asked if Senator Tobin could be more specific regarding outreach engagement. Currently, both professional development and working with individuals occurs.

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SENATOR TOBIN said she would like to know what is occurring for paraprofessionals. Also, the university had 153 education graduates in 2021-2022, but the number of vacancies at just the Anchorage School District (ASD) is over 500. She finds the gap concerning.

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MS. DOUSAY responded that PACE is determining what professional development needs to be to help paraprofessionals become teachers and she is also working with a rural and urban school district to identify constraining needs so that paraprofessionals can get the training needed to obtain a bachelor's degree and Type A teaching license. The lines between an apprenticeship and a grow-your-own program blur when considering the variety of individual needs and place-based learning. When comparing the number of teacher vacancies in Alaska to the number of education graduates, Alaska may not have the population needed to support classrooms, which is the reason for creative recruitment. She described various recruitment ideas.

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MS. PITNEY said Educators Rising is a program that starts in high school to help students identify whether they would like to be a teacher. Both UAS and UAF have paraprofessional partnerships in combination with school districts. The university's apprenticeship program is also a significant recruitment outreach. She said she is pleased with the Teachalaska.org website and the work being done with the foundation to highlight educators as a positive career field. Ads will be released promoting education as a career. There are issues too big for the university to achieve alone. In 1991 wage analyses showed that K-12 teachers in Alaska were paid twice the national average and had the best retirement system making it

easy to attract new teachers. Alaska now offers below-average pay and the least desirable retirement system. She opined that only teachers who really love teaching in Alaska will remain. The university has the capacity for more students. Systemic issues within Alaska's education system need addressing.

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SENATOR STEVENS congratulated the university for its attention to dual enrollment without legislative support. He asked about the status of the contracts the university made with school districts.

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MR. LAYER replied that the university continues growing its face-to-face on-site middle colleges and online advantage program. The Alaska Advantage online program has agreements with over 50 school districts and homeschool students. The popular program provides access to dual enrollment opportunities in areas without campuses. The Fairbanks North Star Borough will expand North Star College from 40 students to over 100. Contracts are also increasing in Anchorage and Juneau. Data shows that dual-enrolled students are successful, obtaining degrees faster and with less debt. He offered to provide the committee with data and information regarding program graduates.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked Mr. Layer to provide the information to the committee.

[4:27:07 PM](#)

DEBORAH CRAIG, Dean, College of Health, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska, turned to slide 9, UAA School of Nursing Program Expansion, and said it is well known nationwide that there is a shortage of nursing staff in hospitals and clinics. The same is true for nurse faculty in healthcare programs. Clinical nurses earn about twice that of faculty nurses. Faculty nurses have continued working for the university because they love what they do. However, program expansion is difficult because recruiting nurse faculty is difficult. The program requires one nurse in a clinical setting for every eight students. Alaska has 14 program sites across the state. The \$3.5 million from the state in FY 23 has helped the program in the following ways:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Growth - RN programs: currently admit 204 students/yr; plan to admit 258 students/yr by 2025
- Growth - MS/DNP programs: currently admit 28 students/yr; plan to admit 36 students/yr by 2025
- Net increase of 8 nursing faculty to support program growth with 5 more searches underway
- Expansion of the RRANN (Recruitment and Retention of Alaska Natives into Nursing) program to recruit more Alaska Native and rural nursing students is in place and recruiting is happening with support from the Premera Foundation
- Sally Monserud Hall facility expansion is underway to create SIM space specialized lab spaces for WWAMI, nursing and allied health programs, which will assist with student enrollment capacity - up to 20% greater capacity.

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MS. CRAIG spoke about the challenges facing program expansion as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Sufficient clinical placement sites for students across Alaska
- We are working diligently to hire more nursing faculty
- Finding nurse educators for our statewide sites is especially challenging

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SENATOR KIEHL asked how many of the 13 nurses needed for program expansion has the university hired. He asked about the 1:8 faculty-to-student ratio and wondered how many nurses would provide clinical training versus classroom training.

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MS. CRAIG said hiring clinical faculty is more challenging, especially in Anchorage. Six of the eight recently hired nurses are clinical trainers. The other two are academic instructors.

The program still needs four clinical and one didactic instructor. Students get hands-on practice through mandated clinical training for patient safety. A qualified faculty member and clinician must manage students' learning and growth. The program accrediting body is the body that requires eight students to one faculty in a clinical setting.

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SENATOR KIEHL asked where the eight faculty were recruited from and where is the program looking for the additional five.

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MS. CRAIG said Nome and Bethel are two of the eight locations filled by recent hires. Dillingham struggles to keep its clinical nursing position filled, and Kodiak's long-term faculty member is retiring. The university provides a geographic differential to faculty working in rural areas. Rural students must attend the programs in Anchorage or Fairbanks when rural outreach programs do not have adequate faculty.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether the university desires to partner with the healthcare industry to train more staff and perhaps receive funding directly from the healthcare industry, similar to the model that trades pursue in supporting their workforce training.

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MS. CRAIG replied that the program works closely with its community partners, such as Providence and Fairbanks Memorial Hospital (FMH). The program encourages clinical staff to become clinical preceptors. Still, COVID burnout and the nurse shortage have made it a challenge because hospitals must hire traveling nurses at two to three times the salary of non-traveling nurses. The university is trying to counter this by growing nurses within Alaska through partnerships.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if the healthcare industry is willing to provide funding to help increase program capacity.

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MS. CRAIG replied yes, but funding does not fix the supply shortage. Plenty of students want to become nurses, and expansion money from the state provides monetary resources, but the university struggles to find nursing faculty. It is very complicated.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if the university has a fully subscribed nursing program.

[4:41:43 PM](#)

MS. CRAIG responded that the university is not having trouble finding students who want to be nurses. However, some of the university's other health care programs have course availability. The university plans to double its master's in social work program within the next four years through Recover Alaska grant funding to reduce mental and behavioral health care needs in Alaska.

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MS. PITNEY said the university supports the apprenticeship model because there is much need for trained workers. Apprenticeship programs will provide on-the-job training that directs students to obtain degrees.

[4:44:04 PM](#)

CHAD HUTCHISON, Director, State Relations, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska, turned to slides 10 - 11 and spoke about what education tax credits (ETCs) are:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Alaska's Education Tax Credit program allows for taxpaying entities to make charitable contributions to support education in Alaska.
- "Think of the big checks."

Credit amounts have evolved over the years as the Alaska Legislature balances the credit received and the state treasury.

- The credits have a sunset date: Currently Jan. 1, 2025. The credits must be continued by the Alaska Legislature, via statute.
- Meet direct workforce demands.

[4:45:13 PM](#)

MR. HUTCHISON moved to slide 12 and stated that a taxpayer is allowed credit for contributions of cash or equipment for:

[Original punctuation provided.]

(1) [...] direct instruction, research, and educational support purposes, including library and museum acquisitions, and contributions to endowment, by an Alaska university foundation or by a nonprofit, public or private, Alaska two-year or four-year college accredited by a national or regional accreditation association;

(2) for secondary school level vocational education courses, programs, and facilities by a school district in the state;

(3) for vocational education courses, programs, and facilities by a state-operated vocational technical education and training school;

(4) for a facility by a nonprofit, public or private, Alaska two-year or four-year college accredited by a national or regional accreditation association;

(5) for Alaska Native cultural or heritage programs and educational support, including mentoring and tutoring, provided by a nonprofit agency for public school staff and for students who are in grades kindergarten through 12 in the state; and

(6) for education, research, rehabilitation, and facilities by an institution that is located in the state and that qualifies as a coastal ecosystem learning center under the Coastal America Partnership established by the federal government.

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MR. HUTCHISON advanced to slide 13 and stated that the legislature had debated various aspects of the credit. The last debate concerning ETC was in 2018. He spoke to the following points regarding the credit:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- The amount of the credit is 50 percent of contributions.

- Combined credit amount may not exceed \$1,000,000. - Cannot reduce a contributor's tax liability to below zero for any tax year.

- "Credit amount" has been subject to much debate. The amounts were reduced when the state treasury was stressed in 2018.

- How long will sunset be?

- Does the Legislature want to return to phased credits (For example: 50% of contributions of not more than \$100,000, 100% of next \$200,000, and 50% of amounts that exceed \$300,000) instead of the flat credit of 50% for contributions?

- Return to the "combined credit cap amount" of \$5,000,000 instead of \$1,000,000?

[4:47:15 PM](#)

MS. PITNEY moved to slides 14-15 and spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**FY24 Budget Summary Status Quo (maintain stability)**

- FY24 Status Quo Operating Budget
  - Maintain Stability - \$24 million (8.3% increase)
    - \$6.5 million - FY23 supplemental compensation (also need in the FY24 base budget)
    - \$12.7 million (\$15.2 million total) FY24 compensation increase
    - \$4.8 million unavoidable fixed cost increases
    - Cyber Security
    - Insurance Premiums
    - Emergency Response & Disability/Health Services
    - Student library digital access
    - Shared Services - HR & Procurement
- FY24 Capital Budget
  - #1 Facilities Modernization - \$2 million space renovation for WWAMI expansion
  - #1 Deferred Maintenance/Renewal & Repurposing - \$17.5 million UAA facility systems

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**FY24 Budget Summary Moving Forward (advance key priorities)**

- FY24 Operating Budget - \$7.2 million
  - \$2.0 million unavoidable fixed costs (facilities maintenance, commodities and contractual services)
  - \$5.2 million programs to build capacity for Alaska's workforce
  
- FY24 Capital Budget
  - \$54.8 million DM/R&R
  - \$19.2 million Facility Modernization
    - UAA College of Health and Library Learning Commons
    - UAF Student Engagement Center
    - UAS Lab Consolidation
  
- Economic Development: Research/Workforce Training Programs (continuation)
  - UA Drone Program Year 2 - \$20 million (\$10 million in Governor's Proposed Budget)
  
- Revenue Assumptions
  - \$899 million total budget authority, \$523 million (58%) is from unrestricted sources
    - \$320 million in state general funds and \$203 million unrestricted earned revenue
  - FY24 UA expects a net \$3 million increase in unrestricted earned revenue
    - Assumes state support for programs
    - \$1 million in tuition and fee revenue as enrollment stabilizes
    - \$2 million in other unrestricted earned revenue, such as interest income, university receipts, and indirect cost recovery (from competitive externally funded research projects)

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MS. PITNEY moved to slide 17, and said she touched on student success initiatives earlier in the presentation and would skip slide 19 unless there were questions about University of Alaska land grants.

[4:53:41 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no questions from the committee. She thanked the presenters.

4:54:43 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:54 p.m.