

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 21, 2024

3:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair
Senator Matt Claman, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator Kelly Merrick

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 185

"An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

- MOVED CSSB 185 (STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 232

"An Act relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age."

- MOVED SB 232 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 223

"An Act relating to the appointment of an assistant adjutant general; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Lieutenant Governor Successor
Major General Torrence Saxe - Juneau

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 185

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

SPONSOR(s): STATE AFFAIRS

01/16/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/24 (S) STA, FIN
02/27/24 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/27/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/27/24 (S) MINUTE(STA)
03/21/24 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 232

SHORT TITLE: VOTER PREREGISTRATION FOR MINORS

SPONSOR(s): KAWASAKI

02/14/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/14/24 (S) STA
03/05/24 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/05/24 (S) Heard & Held
03/05/24 (S) MINUTE(STA)

BILL: SB 223

SHORT TITLE: ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL APPOINTMENT

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/12/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/12/24 (S) STA, JUD
02/27/24 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/27/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/27/24 (S) MINUTE(STA)
03/21/24 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

RILEY VON BORSTEL, Staff
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the summary of changes for SB 185.

ANGELA LAFLAMME, Legislative Liaison
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 223.

MAJOR GENERAL TERRENCE SAXE, Appointee
Lieutenant Governor Successor
Office of the Governor
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the Governor's appointee for Lieutenant Governor Successor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:32:19 PM](#)

CHAIR SCOTT KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Claman, Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Merrick, and Chair Kawasaki.

SB 185-ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

[3:33:46 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 185 "An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

[3:34:04 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited a motion.

[3:34:11 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 185, work order 33-LS0953\U, as the working document.

[3:34:23 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:34:34 PM](#)

RILEY VON BORSTEL, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the summary of changes for SB 185:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Summary of Changes to Senate Bill 185 Version B to U

Section 2

1. Deletes: "nominated by an organization municipal governments in the state and appointed by the

Governor, if, within 60 days after a seat under this paragraph becomes vacant, an organization that represents municipal governments in the state fails to nominate one or more persons to fill the seat, the Governor may appoint any qualified person; an organization that represents municipal governments in the state shall nominate, and the Governor shall appoint,"

2. Adds: "appointed by the Governor; the Governor shall appoint"
3. Deletes: "collectively, the installations represent different branches of the armed forces of the United States, and one of whom, to the extent possible, represents a geographic region not otherwise represented on the commission;"
4. Adds: "(A) the installations, collectively, represent different branches of the armed forces of the United States; and (B) each member represents a different geographic region, to the extent possible;"

[3:36:11 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no further objection and CSSB 185 was adopted as the working document.

[3:36:46 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 185; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[3:36:55 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[3:37:08 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to report CSSB 185, work order 33-LS0953\U, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:37:23 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and CSSB 185, work order 33-LS0953\U, was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

[3:37:38 PM](#)

At ease

SB 232-VOTER PREREGISTRATION FOR MINORS

[3:39:04 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 232 "An Act relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age."

[3:39:59 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[3:40:03 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to report SB 232, work order 33-LS0953\U, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:40:17 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and SB 232, work order 33-LS0953\U, was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

[3:40:44 PM](#)

At ease

SB 223-ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL APPOINTMENT

[3:42:14 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 223 "An Act relating to the appointment of an assistant adjutant general; and providing for an effective date."

[3:42:47 PM](#)

ANGELA LAFLAMME, Legislative Liaison, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Juneau, Alaska, testified on SB 223.

[3:43:09 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 223; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[3:43:40 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited a motion.

[3:43:49 PM](#)

At ease

[3:44:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting.

[3:44:14 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 223 in committee.

CONSIDERATION OF GOVERNOR APPOINTEES
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR SUCCESSOR

[3:44:26 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the confirmation hearing for Major General Torrence Saxe, Lieutenant Governor Designee.

[3:44:43 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL TORRENCE SAXE, Appointee, Lieutenant Governor Successor, Office of the Governor, Juneau, Alaska, spoke to his background:

- Previously enlisted with the U.S. Army and was deployed.
- Military member since then and in the Army National Guard since 2004.
- Has been to every military base at least once, including Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson and Clear Air Force Station twice.
- Was the installation [REDACTED] and was a Wing Commander of 168th; mainly positioned in the interior.
- Lived in Anderson, Healy, and Fairbanks, and is currently in Eagle River.

[3:45:43 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI confirmed that Major General Saxe has spent a lot of time in Alaska and currently lives in Eagle River. He acknowledged the importance of his position.

[3:46:01 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Major General Saxe for his service. He inquired about his perspective on potentially managing Division of Elections, should he become Lieutenant Governor. He wondered what, if any, improvements he would make to the division.

[3:46:41 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he recently met with Carol Beecher, Director of Division of Elections, who briefed him on the division's responsibilities, which are split among 31 people and has a ten percent vacancy rate. He mentioned that he relies heavily on the division and acknowledged its staff's expertise

and decades of experience. He said he would never make a decision without receiving input from those who do that work full-time. He stated that the best thing he could do is to establish trust, transparency, and ensure that all Alaskans can understand how that is illustrated. He said he met with Ms. Beecher and recognized the work that the Division of Elections performs daily.

[3:47:36 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI inquired about the significant rejection of election ballots, particularly in rural Alaska. He mentioned that legislation is in the works to address that problem and asked him to explain his position.

[3:47:56 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE recommended consulting with the Division of Elections for guidance. He stated that expert recommendations could help inform his input.

[3:48:23 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said many states across the country, including Anchorage, are mailing mail-in ballots, which has demonstrated a significant increase in voter turnout. He asked whether he would support that effort on a state level.

[3:48:40 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE reiterated that he would first need input from the Division of Elections.

[3:48:58 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if he believes that widespread voter fraud is a concern in the state and whether the state should address that issue.

[3:49:15 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would defer to the Division of Elections and consult with the experts to address the issue. However, he would not independently make that claim.

[3:49:32 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI wondered about his proximity to becoming the Governor should he become Lieutenant Governor. He inquired about his perspective on the education debate.

[3:49:59 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would follow the direction of the administration as Lieutenant Governor. However, he

acknowledged the importance of education and spoke to his experience as a father of six. Most have attended public schools, and he expressed gratitude for the education his children received. He emphasized that he would consult with the Governor about priorities to move forward.

[3:50:30 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI relayed that some people have predicted familiar scenarios where the Lieutenant Governor designee could become Governor within one year. He asked whether General Saxe would have vetoed SB 140, the education bill that was previously before the legislature.

[3:50:50 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would not speculate on that scenario.

[3:50:52 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asserted that it is not speculation and repeated his question.

[3:51:00 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would have to consult with the experts to ensure all input is made available prior to a veto decision.

[3:51:06 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether he followed the bill throughout the process.

[3:51:08 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied yes.

[3:51:09 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether he thought SB 140 was a good piece of legislation.

[3:51:11 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he supports Governor Dunleavy and his actions.

[3:51:14 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether he supports the Governor's veto decision.

[3:51:15 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he supports the administration.

[3:51:27 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN inquired about the electronic notary process, established through previous legislation.

[3:51:45 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE acknowledged that responsibility of the Lieutenant Governor. However, he stated he has not been briefed on the process. He mentioned that he is familiar with the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) system and noted potential problems. However, the state has moved forward in supporting that system.

[3:51:59 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN noted that ERIC is about voting rather than mobile notaries. He asked specifically for his insight on the electronic notary process.

[3:52:02 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE confirmed that it is.

[3:52:03 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN reiterated his question about the status of the mobile notary process.

[3:52:10 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he does not have any input at this time.

[3:52:13 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN acknowledged his statutory involvement in protecting the state seal and asked whether he has seen any issues, and what is being done to protect it.

[3:52:23 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he was advised by Lieutenant Governor Nancy Dahlstrom to follow the rules and laws, putting them forth in an appropriate manner.

[3:52:44 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reminded Major General Saxe that he was hired by and advises the Governor according to statute. He requested background information on Title 10 and the potential plan to send troops to Arizona.

[3:53:18 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that Title 10, meaning the order to authorize military members to federal status, was applied in 2019 to 2020. A small contingent was sent to Arizona, including some helicopters and maintainers. This will be reestablished around September. Nearly 20 soldiers are sent using La Coda helicopters. He noted that it is likely those soldiers will be sent to Arizona. Volunteers were sought within the Army and aviation community to send down that contingent. However, that has not been confirmed. The process starts with the Federal Chief, the President of the Secretary of Defense, and includes himself and his troops, who will be beginning the mission in September.

[3:54:07 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked whether assigned members would be deployed or released to help defend the operation, excluding the Title 10 mandate.

[3:54:23 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that deployment would be required under state active duty, which would come from a separate commander in chief. In this case, it would be the Governor. However, Governor Dunleavy has not directed that mandate, and nothing has changed since their last conversation.

[3:54:36 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked what he, as the Chief of the Army National Guard, would advise the Governor if he requested feedback.

[3:54:48 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied there are currently troops being deployed under Title 10. If the Governor wanted to deploy troops in state active duty, he would need to initiate the request. He said he would request volunteers.

[3:55:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI clarified his question; he wondered whether troops that are not requested under Title 10, but are requested by the Governor, such as the Governor of Texas in the case of the North Dakota Air Guard, the Governor set aside \$1.5 million in state money for the operation. He asked how he would advise the Governor on that particular mission.

[3:55:40 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would advise the Governor, under state active duty, to obtain volunteers and ensure troops understand what the mission comprises. He stated that he advised

Governor Dunleavy to send roughly 100 troops, which would cost around \$1.5 million (at least \$1 million) for a period of at least 30-90 days. That is the cost of state active duty to send troops down to Texas.

[3:56:14 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked if there is funding within his department budget to send troops down without returning to the legislature for an appropriation. He assumed that volunteer troops could not make the trip for free.

[3:56:31 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied he would not do that. Even considering what the Governor has stated, it would require an additional funding mechanism.

[3:56:52 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI said that the prior Lieutenant Governor under Governor Walker considered, Byron Mallott, considered himself as a partner whenever discussions were needed on education issues. He was dispatched to work on education issues. He asked what kind of a Lieutenant Governor Major General Saxe would be as successor.

[3:57:28 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied he would seek input from the Governor and would be open to whatever that role may be. He acknowledged that some Lieutenant Governors have been broader in their authority and day-to-day responsibilities. However, he reiterated his flexibility in what those duties consist of.

[3:57:52 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked whether, as the Governor's commander of chief for armed forces and as current commissioner for DMVA, he would simultaneously remain in charge of DMVA.

[3:58:17 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would retire in that scenario due to a conflict of interest.

[3:58:22 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether he views the Lieutenant Governor as someone underneath the Governor or one who acts autonomously regarding obligations and duties.

[3:58:40 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that there are administration obligations. However, there are certain duties, such as within the Division of Elections, where enforcement is necessary and the law must be followed precisely.

[3:58:54 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked him how he would respond, as Lieutenant Governor, if the Governor asked him to do something disagreeable regarding the Division of Elections.

[3:59:08 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would follow and align with the law.

[3:59:15 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there is anyone historically who shares his governing philosophy.

[3:59:29 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that it would likely be someone within Alaska. He noted that he is registered as a Republican, so he falls on that side of the belief system. However, in his military role, he emphasized that he must remain apolitical.

[3:59:46 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI replied that he understands his position. However, he suggested that he would potentially be putting himself in a political position. He reiterated his question about his governing philosophy.

[3:59:56 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that, with regard to general government, he would ensure every resident has dignity and is respected. It would not **be ___ must live.** He said he would put forth all efforts within his authority to ensure that is made possible.

[4:00:10 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI wondered whether there are any major changes, including to the governing system, which he would like to see in Alaska.

[4:00:20 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE replied that he would consult with experts and not make any major decisions beforehand. In each of his commands, and as a collaborative leader, he established a policy to consult with others first. He stated that it would be a

mistake to not consider input. He expressed his belief that the government is for the people.

[4:01:21 PM](#)

At ease

[4:01:29 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on the appointment of Major General Torrence Saxe for Lieutenant Governor Successor; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[4:01:47 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited a motion.

[4:01:53 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved that Major General Torrence Saxe, designated Lieutenant Governor Successor, be forwarded to the joint session for consideration. This does not reflect the intent of any of the members to vote for or against the confirmation of the individuals during any further session.

[4:02:27 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that without objection, the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointment be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

Lieutenant Governor Successor

Major General Torrence Saxe - Juneau

[4:03:17 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:03 p.m.