

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 19, 2025

1:03 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, Co-Chair
Representative Maxine Dibert, Co-Chair
Representative Carolyn Hall
Representative Donna Mears
Representative Zack Fields
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Julie Coulombe
Representative Bill Elam

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative George Rauscher

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Regulatory Commission of Alaska

Steven Devries - Anchorage
Mark Johnston - Anchorage
John Springsteen - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

STEVEN DEVRIES, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

MARK JOHNSTON, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

JOHN SPRINGSTEEN, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:03:23 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ROBYN NIAYUQ BURKE called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Representatives Coulombe, Hall, Mears, Dibert, and Burke were present at the call to order. Representatives Fields, Elam, and Saddler arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :
Regulatory Commission of Alaska

[1:04:22 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BURKE announced that the only order of business would be the confirmation hearing on the governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska. She described the role of the commission and stated that public testimony regarding the appointees would be scheduled for a later date.

[1:04:52 PM](#)

STEVEN DEVRIES, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, testified as the Governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA). He described his background and professional experience including previous work with the RCA [resume included in the committee file].

[1:07:11 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES responded to several questions from Representative Saddler by explaining how his legal background and experience representing the Alaska Attorney General's office was relevant to the work of the commission. He also described the process of evaluating utility rates that would be fair, reasonable, and not excessive while simultaneously ensuring that the utilities are safe and effective.

[1:10:38 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES, in response to several questions posed by Representative Mears, described the commission as a reactive agency which acted on matters brought before it. He noted that some of the energy challenges faced by Alaska included the potential shortage of natural gas in Cook Inlet, the needs of Railbelt utilities, transmission constraints of the Railbelt, assisting open access of the transmission system, and how energy costs on the Railbelt impacted rural Alaska.

[1:16:18 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES addressed a question posed by Representative Fields regarding the drastic utility rate escalation which occurred in Aniak in 2023 and how the commission could help avoid such situations in the future. He described several potential solutions that have been brought before the RCA.

[1:20:27 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES, in response to several questions from Representative Saddler, described RCA's employment challenges and the impacts of attrition. He posited that despite those challenges, the RCA does excellent work. On the topic of incentives, he said that when he considered coming out of retirement, the increased salaries were an enticement but not as much of a factor as his interest in RCA's work.

[1:25:12 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES responded to a question from Representative Mears regarding coordinating the utilities along the Railbelt and how to ensure that utilities meet the requirements set out by the RCA. He described the types of enforcement tools available to the commission but emphasized the importance of imposing realistic objectives and using subtle encouragement rather than coercive steps.

[1:30:41 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES addressed a question from Co-Chair Dibert, regarding the expense of utilities in Fairbanks. He acknowledged the difficulties faced by Fairbanks residents and said that potential viable solutions brought before the commission would receive serious consideration.

[1:33:31 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES responded to a question from Representative Fields by describing a typical approval process for utility projects.

[1:38:33 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES, in response to a question from Representative Saddler, provided examples of matters the commission has responded to. He pointed out that the commission has jurisdictional boundaries.

[1:40:53 PM](#)

HEARD AND HELD

[1:40:58 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BURKE announced that the next order of business would be consideration of Mark Johnston, the governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

[1:41:22 PM](#)

MARK JOHNSTON, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, testified as the Governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA). He described his background, professional experience, and how his appointment aligned with statutory requirements [resume included in the committee file].

[1:44:10 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON responded to Representative Mears question regarding the sale of Municipal Light & Power (ML&P) to Chugach Electric. He described the process, the rationale, and the advantages of the sale.

[1:48:38 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON addressed several questions posed by Representative Fields. He discussed tariff actions and the cost of power in various Alaskan communities. He touched on the importance of understanding new technologies and mentioned the Anchorage landfill "trash to energy" project. He also discussed ways to increase energy efficiency.

[1:57:01 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON responded to a question from Representative Saddler regarding the 2023 Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) resolution. He emphasized the importance of having highly qualified RCA commissioners who can deal with Alaska's unique challenges.

[1:59:16 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Dibert, discussed the energy costs faced by Fairbanks residents. He described several projects that could help lower costs, pointing out the importance of looking at a variety of potential solutions. He discussed cold weather heat pumps and programs for implementing efficiency upgrades to homes .

[2:06:34 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON responded to Representative Mears question about variable or differential rates for utility costs. He explained that the RCA can make suggestions in response to petitions which could incentivize a customer or a rate payer to make specific types of changes.

[2:09:37 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON, in response to several questions from Representative Coulombe, explained that wind farms could lower utility rates depending on the equipment being used. He discussed the variables that should be taken into consideration when considering renewable energy. He described the RCA's role in helping determine what the actual cost would be and whether there was a benefit to ratepayers.

[2:13:47 PM](#)

HEARD AND HELD

[2:14:06 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BURKE announced that the final order of business would be consideration of John Springsteen, the governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

[2:14:30 PM](#)

JOHN SPRINGSTEEN, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, testified as the Governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA). He described his background, professional experience, and his familiarity with Alaska's energy concerns [resume included in the committee file].

[2:19:43 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN, in response to a question from Representative Elam, described the RCA's role as being largely reactive. He pointed out that more considerations come into play when there are different energy developers working with the utility companies. He referred to a previous anchor tenet in Japan that drew natural gas from Alaska and had allowed Alaska to have a relatively low-cost supply of natural gas. He described the advantages of having that type of relationship with different companies.

[2:22:27 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN responded to a question from Representative Fields regarding whether the RCA can look beyond technology proposals brought before the commission and suggest other generation and storage technologies. He explained that some of the key tenets of the RCA concerned whether a project is "fit, willing, and able" as it applies to energy. The discussions of projects included consideration of intermittency, seasonality, and distance. He pointed out the advantages of having an advanced look if a variety of technologies were brought to the table such as through public presentations. He also described the use of storage batteries as transition devices.

[2:25:55 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN, in response to a question from Representative Mears, discussed the challenges of retaining staffing, pointing out that these concerns were being faced by the state in general. He described how the RCA supports workforce development to retain qualified employees.

[2:28:56 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN, in response to a question from Co-Chair Dibert, explained how his work with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation for energy and weatherization loans applied to the work of the RCA. He also referenced the Alaska Energy Authority

and the work they did assisting with larger scale rural energy programs.

[2:30:45 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN addressed several questions from Representative Saddler by discussing the RCA's work with the Railbelt energy cooperatives, the Railbelt Reliability Council, the integrated resource plans, and the Railbelt Transmission Organization. He referenced needing to be aware of pancaking of rates. He also pointed out the importance of considering intermittency, seasonality, and distance and how those concerns affected the planning process. He explained that the RCA worked within the boundaries established by the legislature and did not set energy policies.

[2:34:06 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN responded to a question from Representative Hall regarding workforce development and how the RCA worked to retain employees.

[2:35:31 PM](#)

HEARD AND HELD

[2:36:01 PM](#)

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:36 p.m.