

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 29, 2025

1:01 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Ashley Carrick, Chair
Representative Andi Story, Vice Chair
Representative Rebecca Himschoot
Representative Ky Holland
Representative Sarah Vance
Representative Elexie Moore

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Kevin McCabe

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 58

"An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 35

"An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 16

"An Act amending campaign contribution limits for state and local office; directing the Alaska Public Offices Commission to adjust campaign contribution limits for state and local office once each decade beginning in 2031; and relating to campaign contribution reporting requirements."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 58

SHORT TITLE: OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FIELDS

01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (H) CRA, STA
03/11/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/11/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/11/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/13/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/13/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/18/25 (H) Moved HB 58 Out of Committee
03/18/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/21/25 (H) CRA RPT 4DP 1NR
03/21/25 (H) DP: HOLLAND, HALL, HIMSCHOOT, MEARS
03/21/25 (H) NR: PRAX
03/27/25 (H) STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/27/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/27/25 (H) MINUTE(STA)
03/29/25 (H) STA AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 35

SHORT TITLE: PRISONERS: ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS/USE
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) HIMSCHOOT

01/22/25 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (H) CRA, STA
02/20/25 (H) CRA AT 9:00 AM BARNES 124
02/20/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/20/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
02/25/25 (H) CRA AT 9:00 AM BARNES 124
02/25/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/25/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
02/27/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/27/25 (H) Scheduled but Not Heard
03/13/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25 (H) Moved CSHB 35(CRA) Out of Committee
03/13/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/14/25 (H) CRA RPT CS(CRA) 3DP 3AM
03/14/25 (H) DP: HALL, MEARS, HIMSCHOOT
03/14/25 (H) AM: HOLLAND, PRAX, RUFFRIDGE
03/27/25 (H) STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/27/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/27/25 (H) MINUTE(STA)
03/29/25 (H) STA AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 16

SHORT TITLE: CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

SPONSOR(s) : REPRESENTATIVE(s) SCHRAGE

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	STA, FIN
03/27/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/27/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/27/25	(H)	MINUTE (STA)
03/29/25	(H)	STA AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

Courtney Owen, Staff
Representative Zack Fields
POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Fields, prime sponsor, gave a recap of HB 58.

BOBBY DORTON, Consultant
Healing Homes
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 35.

REPRESENTATIVE CALVIN SCHRAGE
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, reintroduced HB 16.

BEVERLY CHURCHILL Volunteer
Alaska Move to Amend
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

MIKE COONS, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 16.

KEVIN MORFORD, President
Alaska Move to Amend
Chugiak, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

FRANK BOX, Volunteer
Citizens Against Money in Politics
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

MITCHELL ROTH, representing self

Girdwood, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

LOUIS THEISS, representing self

Girdwood, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

MERCEDES ARCINIEGA

Alaska Public Interest Research Group

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

LEON JAIMES, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

JAN CAROLYN HARDY, State President

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
Retirees

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:01:18 PM](#)

CHAIR ASHLEY CARRICK called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Representatives Story, Himschoot, Holland, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Representatives Vance and More arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 58-OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

[1:02:14 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 58, "An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

[1:02:56 PM](#)

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff, Representative Zack Fields, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Fields, prime sponsor, gave a recap of HB 58. She said the bill would make the selection process for public advocates the same as those for public defenders.

[1:03:16 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK opened public testimony on HB 58. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony on HB 58.

[1:03:42 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 58 was held over.

HB 35-PRISONERS: ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS/USE

[1:03:48 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 35, "An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners." [Before the committee was CSHB 35(CRA).]

[1:04:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT, as sponsor, presented CSHB 35(CRA), which would set guidelines and policy to allow department of corrections to obtain and regulate tablets computers for the incarcerated population.

[1:04:55 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK opened public testimony on CSHB 35(CRA)

[1:05:11 PM](#)

BOBBY DORTON, Consultant, Healing Homes, testified in support of HB 35. Drawing on his lived experience as an incarcerated person, he stated that he didn't have the tools to be educated and get good employment or a career before he was released. To further illustrate his point, Mr. Dorton stated, "I did have McDonald's waiting for me and I did ... wash dishes, but I had to fund ... the credentials once I got out. I was really hoping for those credentials while I was in." While he was eventually able to start a new life for himself as a substance abuse counselor and found Healing Homes, a firm which brings peer support and case management to various organizations serving individuals within the criminal justice system throughout the U.S., Mr. Dorton further discussed the lack of opportunities for incarcerated persons, stating that he could have had a master's

degree upon release rather than being a dishwasher. His main point for supporting the bill was stated when he said, "If we could just help the guys to have a purpose, they'll get out and be better people." He further stated that if inmates did not have access to obtain the skills, training, and credentials they would need to succeed when released, Alaska would risk losing such people "in the wind," causing inmates to do labor and "other things," whereas he believed their passion for helping others is inside them and they could follow such a passion if given the chance to do so. Instead, Mr. Dorton argued, many of these individuals are getting locked into a labor workforce.

1:08:36 PM

CHAIR CARRICK, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on CSHB 35(CRA).

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CHAIR CARRICK asked if there were further questions.

1:08:54 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE thanked both the chair and Representative Himschoot for carrying the proposed legislation, which has been through the legislature many times and deals with things that are not easy issues. She emphasized the need to look at many things regarding how incarcerated people will succeed upon release. She said that the changes in CSHB 35(CRA) appear reasonable and the committee in drafting this bill was giving the commissioner of the Department of Corrections a lot of authority in the distribution of tablet computers. Representative Vance stated that some of her colleagues expressed the reservation of wanting to ensure that tablets are used for rehabilitative education and not entertainment purposes. Representative Vance elaborated that this was because the conversation around CSHB 35(CRA) mimics discussions about good use cases with phones and tablets regarding children. She and stated, "We want what's best for everyone when it comes to ... utilizing the technology in a positive way, and not ... one that's going to pull someone into isolation...and unhealthy activities." Representative Vance stated that she appreciates the opportunity to learn more about how "we can help people re-enter ... our communities in a more positive and healthy way." She said that she hopes this year will be the year to get CSHB 35(CRA) "over the finish line" and thanked her colleagues for their work on the issue over the years.

[1:10:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed thanks to Representative Vance for her work on CSHB 35(CRA) and echoed many of Representative Vance's talking points by saying, "It's not a simple bill. We don't want to rush it, but it has been heard several times, and it would be nice if we could get it through this year."

[1:11:19 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that CSHB 35(CRA) was held over.

HB 16-CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

[1:11:42 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 16, "An Act amending campaign contribution limits for state and local office; directing the Alaska Public Offices Commission to adjust campaign contribution limits for state and local office once each decade beginning in 2031; and relating to campaign contribution reporting requirements."

[1:12:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CALVIN SCHRAGE, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, reintroduced HB 16.

[1:12:50 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK opened public testimony on HB 16. Each testifier was limited to three minutes.

[1:13:17 PM](#)

BEVERLY CHURCHILL, Volunteer, Alaska Move to Amend, testified in support of HB 16. Ms. Churchill stated that she has been fighting to regulate campaign finance for 15 years. Drawing on her experience of advocacy, she stated that it is known via surveys that a majority of Alaska voters support the regulation of campaign contributions. During the previous summer, Ms. Churchill stated, she collected signatures for Ballot Measure 1 [2026] and that spoke with voters from all over the state and received signatures from both progressives and conservatives alike. She continued as follows:

The conservatives were upset that Peltola was getting PAC money from outside. The liberals were upset that Dunleavy was getting money from his wealthy brother. I mean, I heard ... from all different ... stripes of voters. The point is ... many and most states have a law that regulates this, and ours was struck down, but not because it was unconstitutional, but because it was considered unreasonable, and it was very low, one of the lowest in the nation. It's time to restore something.

MS. CHURHILL further elaborated that lots of people were concerned about wealthy and corporate donors and Political Action Committees (PACs). Ms. Churchill stated that while under current precedence, the State of Alaska did not have the legal right to regulate campaign finance, the state could endorse a constitutional amendment to regulate campaign finance on a national level. Ms. Churchill also referred to the then current Wisconsin Supreme Court race, saying, "Right now, Elon Musk is pouring money into Wisconsin over a ... judge ... election because he is unhappy about a certain law they have in Wisconsin. This is just unconscionable." While Ms. Churchill said she understood that constitutional amendments were not currently being considered by the committee, she urged the committee to consider amendments and other bills relating to campaign finance and voting and stated that the state needed to be strong with such actions. Overall, she testified in support of HB 16.

[1:16:48 PM](#)

MIKE COONS, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 16. He read a prepared statement [included in the committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

My name is Mike Coons from Wasilla and speaking for myself.

I oppose HB 16.

First and most importantly, this is in violation of our 1st Amendment rights. This violates the Citizens United and Thompson vs Hebdon Supreme Court and 9th Circuit rulings on this issue.

Second, what is a nongroup entity? Will this disallow me to support a candidate along with like minded people in an informal group?

Third, this does nothing as to outside organizations whom out spent 1000 to 1 the repeal Rank Choice Voting petition. Does this allow outside of Alaska groups and/or individuals to treat our elections as a cheap date and contribute thousands to say the Senator from District H?

Fourth, this violates our right to support organizations, including the Alaska Republican Party whom then help conservative candidates. How do the Democrat voters feel about being restricted in their contributions to the Democrat Party?

Lastly, this does nothing as to the mega donors for Federal elections. Those Federal elections are for our House seat and two Senators, all of whom are directly responsible to support Alaskans and all of Alaska, same as this legislature.

In my opinion the sponsors of this bill are afraid of people like Elon Musk, the Republican National Committee, the Alaska Republican Party, whom has a much stronger leader, as well as others with deep pockets, both in and outside of Alaska. The sponsors of this bill are willing to violate the 1st Amendment rights of all Alaskans to stop the Republican party effectively winning seats, yet potentially leaving open the Democrats to contribute without any restrictions for their candidates and causes. If not, I am sure Democrat donors will not be happy with this!

The Executive Order by President Trump on elections does far more for election integrity than what this slim Democrat/RINO majority has ever done or willing to do!

[1:19:29 PM](#)

KEVIN MORFORD, President, Alaska Move to Amend, testified in support of HB 16. As president of Alaska Move to Amend, he stated that his organization advocates for the rights of all Alaska, is an all-volunteer organization, and advocates for "good public policy regarding political issues in Alaska." He

further stated that the only stake that his organization has in campaign finance limits is that "we all want a fair election system that does not allow the voices of a powerful few to be amplified with money to the point where ordinary citizens are irrelevant to the political process." Thus, Mr. Morford stated that his organization is in strong support of HB 16, as the bill is "an important and necessary first step towards equalizing the ability of ordinary citizens to be heard in political discourse in Alaska." This is in part due to HB 16 being identical to Ballot Measure 1 [2026] which was supported by Alaska Move to Amend, which collected signatures for said proposition. Enacting the bill, Mr. Morford argued, was essential so that the law would be in effect for the 2026 election.

MR. MORFORD stated that while Alaskans have had a long and consistent history of supporting campaign finance limits, Alaska only lost prior campaign finance limits because of a decision made by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals [referring to the Thompson v. Hebdon case]. Mr. Morford stated that HB 16 has been formulated with previous court rulings in mind, and though it doesn't solve all problems, it takes "an important step toward limiting the amount of influence that can be purchased with donations to campaign elections." Mr. Morford stated that certain limits outside the scope of the bill included independent expenditure limits, which are due to current constitutional law and Supreme Court rulings on the issue [referring to Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission]. Thus, according to Mr. Morford, such expenditures would need constitutional amendments to address. However, Mr. Morford stated that such rulings "should not stop us from doing what we can now to ... solve the problems that we can." Thus, he urged the committee to move HB 16 out of committee so that the bill could be referred to the House Finance Committee and later a full vote on the House floor.

[1:22:39 PM](#)

FRANK BOX, Volunteer, Citizens Against Money in Politics, testified in support of HB 16. Mr. Box stated that people from all political stripes he met while volunteering said there was too much money in politics. During his time volunteering for the organization, he talked to people of "all political stripes," the vast majority of which said there was "too much money in politics. Mr. Box stated that even the people on the right agree that there is too much money in politics. While HB 16 would not address dark money, "it's a good first start."

Thus, Mr. Box urged the committee to "pass it on to ... the next step."

1:24:28 PM

MITCHELL ROTH, representing self, testified in support of HB 16. Mr. Roth stated that the bill is based on Ballot Measure 1 [2026]. However, if the legislature acted sooner, it would have an opportunity to strengthen campaign finance laws by enacting HB 16. He stated that his experience of gathering signatures was like those described in the testimonies of Ms. Churchill, Mr. Box, and Mr. Morford, expressing that voters from all parties in fact were really upset about campaign expenditures. Mr. Roth also stated that many people he met while collecting signatures didn't know campaign finance limits existed for 16 years and were effective. He noted there has been a dramatic change since the 2022 Election, when the 9th circuit court of appeals ruled that the limits were much too low because they hadn't been adjusted in 16 years and money poured into all the elections, with no sign of slowing down.

MR. ROTH said that enacting this legislation would provide some control over limits to campaign contributions. While Mr. Roth acknowledged that there are "ways for a person to get around these limits if a person really wants to do that," HB 16 would allow for some level of tracking where campaign contributions came from. He cited the ranked choice voting campaign as an example of a campaign that was able to skirt regulations on campaign finance. Thus Mr. Roth urged the committee to pass HB 16 out of committee with a "do pass" recommendation.

1:27:21 PM

LOUIS THEISS, representing self, testified in support of HB 16. He stated that he has been a modest donor to political campaigns throughout the last 25 years or so. He said that while campaigns themselves were very expensive, they often "wastes a lot of a candidate's time" as the candidate is spending much of their time raising money, rather than being able to meet with their constituents about the issues. He argued that tying a limit on campaign donation to account for inflation seems "very sensible and democratic." He added that what he opposes is "no limits at all" for campaign contributions. He further stated that Alaska is a small state where it's easier for wealthy donors to have decisive impacts on elections that [by contributing sums] dilute his little \$100 contribution. He expressed support for elections and ballot initiatives that are

decided by "a plurality of voters rather than the wealth of special interests," thus allowing for locally supported candidates and ballot initiatives to succeed rather than those supported by outside groups. He thus urged HB 16 to be passed out of committee "in fairness to all the small people" with a "good recommendation for the next step."

[1:29:36 PM](#)

MERCEDES ARCINIEGA, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, testified in support of HB 16. Ms. Arciniega testified that HB 16 would level the playing field for all Alaskans. Under current Alaska Public Office Commission (APOC) rules, she argued, Alaska had no limits on campaign contributions when it came to individuals and groups both within and outside of Alaska and thus left Alaska elections with "vulnerable to unfair and extreme unrestrictive and external funding." She further stated without any limits in place, the election system in Alaska was "unprotected from corruption and from the outside influence of wealthy special interests." Both historically and with 2006 ballot initiative results, Alaskans have shown that prioritizing financial equity has been of paramount importance, Ms. Arciniega argued. However, after such limitations were overturned by courts in cases like Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission and Thompson v. Hebdon, APOC "strongly suggested the legislature to act, and to prioritize state campaign finance law to align with the will of the voters." Ms. Arciniega stated that now is the moment for the legislature to act in a manner that honors Alaskan's wishes by ensuring their values are reflected in state law. Further, Ms. Arciniega stated that the 10-year inflation adjustments proposed in the bill would make the intention stronger and lead to a more "sustainable and long-term framework." She urged HB 16 to be passed out of committee and to be enshrined into law.

[1:32:13 PM](#)

LEON JAIMES, representing self, testified in support of HB 16. He stated, "Our government was supposed to be by and for people and not by and for the billionaires." He stated that HB 16 would help ensure that candidates can't be bought by the highest bidder, and that they have...a stronger interest in "campaigning for their constituents instead of with outside groups that have more money than Alaskans together can raise." He urged that HB 16 be moved out of committee with a recommendation to pass the bill.

[1:33:34 PM](#)

JAN CAROLYN HARDY, State President, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Retirees, testified in support of HB 16. She stated that the lack of campaign contribution limits has created a new opportunity for special access, tax breaks, and undue influence by the wealthy. She opined "One need only look at the current situation in Washington to see that practice is in effect." She emphasized the need to get big money out of politics. She stated, "Every voter has one vote, but when that vote is colored by the size of the contribution, that is when one vote speaks louder than the other."

MS. HARDY also stated that there was a need for a wider range of candidates, which she believes would be inhibited by the lack of limits on campaign contributions. To this end, she stated, "In order to give the electorate a fair chance against wealthy concerns, it is vital for us to have campaign contribution limits. No one should be able to purchase a seat in the legislature."

[1:35:02 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 16.

CHAIR CARRICK opened HB 16 to committee questions.

[1:35:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said that she has gotten comments regarding the proposed bill related to both the desire for someone "not being able to buy a seat," but also concerns about how federal law would remain unaffected by the bill. She said a suggestion was to tighten up disclosure rules so the public could be informed about the contributions of groups outside of Alaska. Representative Story stated that she wondered if the bill's sponsor had thought about such a provision in the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said it has been thought about, specifically referring to a bill introduced into the Thirty-Second Alaska State Legislature by Representative Rassmussen. He said some bills in previous legislatures addressed this issue. Provisions on disclosure were not included in HB 16 because the issue was not as straightforward as individual campaign financial contribution limits. There wasn't a clear

consensus as to the form of such legislation. Representative Schrage said his primary intent is to "address the gaping hole we have in our campaign finance laws here in Alaska." Representative Schrage said that the issue could be something the legislature could build on, but most of the action taken by the legislature up until this point has been in keeping with a targeted approach on campaign finance.

[1:37:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked if the bill would limit the contributions of individual groups outside of Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE answered that HB 16 would apply uniform limits to groups; there would be no special exemption for groups outside of Alaska. Representative Schrage suggested that Representative Vance may have been referring to independent expenditure groups, which were, in his mind, "a different topic." and asked Representative Vance for clarification.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE offered her understanding that HB 16 specifically would not limit individual expenditure groups, stating that the only limits to campaign contributions were to individual Alaskans.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded this is not correct, as the bill would impose limits on donations from all individuals, not just Alaskans that are made directly to candidates. The most straightforward reasons to do so, referring to rulings made by the U.S. Supreme Court [i.e. Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission] on the issue that limits to financial contributions are allowed for the purposes of fighting "the appearance or actuality of corruption," and noted that the Supreme Court holds that free speech is very important [as the US Supreme Court held that campaign contributions are a form of free speech]. Representative Schrage also noted that the Supreme Court said that this right is limited. He remarked:

Just as you can't scream fire in a crowded movie theatre, you also have the right to regulate how much someone can contribute to an individual, because there is a legitimate purpose in curtailing free speech to eliminate that risk of corruption or the appearance thereof.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that under HB 16, the legislature has applied a uniform limit to all individuals both within and

outside of Alaska when it comes to campaign contributions. Referring to Citizens United, by which financial contributions to a campaign could go through an individual expenditure group rather than directly to or without direct coordination with a campaign, he said the bill would be mitigating the risk of corruption as it would be in accordance with that ruling. The bill would primarily target "mega donations" to candidates from individual donors. Representative Schrage said that he himself gets donations that he is uncomfortable accepting and also stated that he talked to many Alaskans with this concern. He referred to Alaska's history of corruption and mistrust of public officials, and many, don't want to see someone get a \$10,000 or \$5,000 donation, as the total budget from one campaign, according to Representative Schrage, is often \$100,000 from one individual.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked if Representative Schrage provided ample evidence on the record of undue influence "mega contributions." She stated that the reason for her question was that case law indicates "that we have to have a very high bar and show that there has been undue influence by these contributions."

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said this is not his understanding of what the court has said, saying, "They have not said that you have to prove that a certain amount has caused corruption or undue influence." He further stated that if some other justification for limits is created, "then you do need to provide a very clear record for why those special justifications are warranted or why that lower limit is warranted." Representative Schrage stated that the courts have said that if limits are put in place to fight the appearance of corruption, then they are valid. These limits are lawful provided they withstand legal scrutiny, of which HB 16 outlines five factors that Representative Schrage presented at a prior hearing and stated that he was willing to discuss those factors with members of the committee further if desired.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that since Representative Schrage mentioned the presence of "mega contributions", she would like further clarification on his ideas about those beyond the \$10,000 or \$5,000 contributions he mentioned, and she requested names of the contributors. Representative Vance said she had not paid much attention to the contributions to all of her colleagues, but that such information was important for the record because of the risk of litigation.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that he wanted to be very clear on his remarks, as such "mega contributions" create "the appearance or risk that members of the public may believe that there is undue influence" on elected officials and candidates. He said that all members of the committee are outstanding individuals who do their best to ensure that campaign contributions are not unduly influencing them. However, Representative Schrage stated that the courts have ruled that even the appearance of corruption can do enough damage to public institutions and the rule of law that action is warranted. Therefore, Representative Schrage said that he doesn't think there is undue influence currently but there is an appearance of undue influence.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted that Representative Schrage said that had said HB 16 mirrors a 2026 ballot initiative. She asked asked, "If it's already going to be before the people, why move it through the legislature now?"

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said it gives the legislature an opportunity to take care of the issue of campaign contribution limits now, thus saving on the time and expense of bringing such a measure to the ballot. Representative Schrage said he would love to see the legislature pass HB 16 this year to ensure election integrity. In reference to representative Vance's comment that she "doesn't pay too close attention" to campaign contributions, Representative Schrage said that he has looked at campaign donations and a few of them are "actually big." and that citizens are concerned when they see that. Representative Schrage says he wants to restore the perceived integrity of Alaska's elections and that he worries about the appearance of corruption. In reference to Representative Vance's earlier question if Representative Schrage had names of "mega contributors," he said that it was very easy to go to the APOC website and do a donor search and present the data in Excel. Doing so, Representative Schrage said he has seen donations upward of \$10,000 multiple times, which he believes is too much.

[1:46:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that people have talked about both ballot measures and outside money. To illustrate her point, she referred to the 2013 campaign for an Oil and Gas Tax Reform Bill in which \$18 million was spent according to Representative Himschoot, and the Ranked Choice Voting campaign in which she estimated that \$40 million was spent. She noted that these are massive sums of money and she asked, "Are we allowed to limit

outside money or is that what the Supreme Court was talking about with free speech in terms of ballot measures?"

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE stated that such a matter was not a topic he has expertise in but said that based on the rulings in both Thompson v. Hebdon and Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, he does not know if there is a lot the legislature can do to limit independent expenditure. However, Representative Schrage said that the State of Alaska had the right to do was demand disclosure for campaign contributions. To what extent the required disclosure would reach into a campaign's or a donor's activities or relationships between the two, he stated that he could do more research on the topic and be able to answer the committee's questions on it. He stated that he has tried to be responsive to the actions of the courts and taken a very narrow approach to the issues such rulings have brought to Alaska. These were questions that he believed the legislature should investigate in the future.

[1:48:38 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK inquired about the availability of definitions and specifically requested a clarifying definition of "group" or "non-group" entity.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said if the committee members were looking at definitions of a non-group entity provided in the bill, there was an example mentioned in a print off, the Alaska Conservation Voters PAC. Representative Schrage stated that his understanding of a "group" entity is an umbrella term that included the sub-group of political parties. Representative Schrage said he was going to ask for a few examples to follow up with the committee via an inquiry with APOC. He said that HB 16 had traction within the legislature, but that he was getting "tripped up" on the definitions used in the bill.

CHAIR CARRICK talked about the confusion surrounding the definitions of group and non-group entities. All entities in either of those brackets are held to the same standard of \$4,000 donation caps, and individuals would have a lower donation cap. To illustrate the effects of such a classification, she asked for confirmation that there's nothing that prevents someone who is affiliated with a PAC group from also making an individual contribution to a candidate up to that limit.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE confirmed this is correct.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that she is highly uncomfortable with limiting free speech. She noted that HB 16, would limit campaign contributions from individuals and that the state was not able to "limit PACS or independent expenditures." Representative Vance therefore asked what the difference in weight on influence in elections between individual contributions and PACS and independent expenditure groups is.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that there are options for the legislature to limit campaign contributions from PACs and individual expenditure groups. He also stated that there are multiple options for citizens to exercise their right to free speech including donating to a party or a PAC, creating a PAC, and donating individually to candidates. He said that the issue of campaign contributions as free speech was not "as simple as just weighing an individual to candidate contribution limit versus free speech; this is nuanced." He stated that he is a strong believer in free speech and said that he had been in politics for five years, which in his mind still gives him some of the perspective of a citizen. He reiterated that he shares a mutual concern of the impact that wealthy individuals have on Alaska's political process. He stated that he thinks HB 16 strikes a good balance between the ability of an individual to influence an election and the ability of the legislature to ensure trust in the election process and with elected officials.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that she understands that the words in the bill make its authority broad but pointed to Representative Schrage's testimony during which he repeatedly said that HB 16 aims to limit the outside contributions to PAC and individuals. However, Representative Vance said that such authority was not described directly in bill and asked as to why it was that such authority was not specifically outlined in statute.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said the Supreme Court has explicitly ruled that Alaska cannot curtail outside donations specifically. The reason that the State of Alaska would be able to put limits in place, according to Representative Schrage, would be to fight the appearance of or actuality of corruption. Referring to Thompson v. Hebdon, he stated that the justices overseeing the case asked why the influence of out-of-state donations is less corruptive than the influence of in-state ones. Representative Schrage stated that through previous iterations of the bill, he has tried to find ways to limit out-of-state donations, and so far, he has been unable to find anything that he believes

withstands legal scrutiny. Therefore, he concluded that the state could not place a monetary limit on out-of-state donations, despite his personal disagreements.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE spoke to Representatives Himshoot's question on ballot initiatives, saying that Alaskans feel strongly that there is a "an obscene amount of money coming from the outside to influence Alaskans." She acknowledged that contributions must be disclosed' but remarked there are a lot of people who don't know how to navigate APOC's website, which puts them at a disadvantage, and makes it unlikely they will take the time to retrieve disclosed information on campaign contributions. She further stated that she thinks there is value in specifically outlining nonresidents, as well as long as the state treats them on the same level as residents.". She asked Representative Schrage if that was something that he had considered; if non-residents were put on same footing so that the legislature can limit campaign contributions from them as well.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said he was not exactly sure what Representative Vance was proposing but was open to discussion. However, Representative Schrage said that because out-of-state donors may be discouraged from making donations directly to candidates, donations to independent expenditure groups are preferred by such donors to deploy their money on a masse scale. According to Representative Schrage, Representatives Vance's concerns that disclosure requirements are insufficient is warranted precisely for the reasons she cited.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE observed there is money coming in from both sides-you see organized efforts coming in from both sides of an issue-and they comb through each other's reports. This phenomenon leads to wars of attrition in the media and campaigns between both candidates and independent expenditure groups on opposite sides of a race or issue. Because disclosures allow groups to see expenditures, they can be helpful because they allow those groups to "have some transparency into each other." Representative Schrage acknowledged that while there would probably never be a perfect system, the reason why he limited the scope of HB 16 to direct-to-candidate contributions is that he doesn't know of a consensus in dealing with contributions from out-of-state donors. Because of the urgency of the issue at hand, Representative Schrage said that he is utilizing something that his legislative experience has taught him; the narrower the bill, the faster it can move. His preference is to work on another bill to address this other issue.

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CHAIR CARRICK asked what campaign contribution limits could mean for non-traditional candidates. She stated that she thought about what it looks like for young people running for office and in those situations, finances are often the number one barrier for a campaign. Therefore, she asked what Representative Schrage had heard anecdotally about potential limits.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that one of the criticisms of old contribution limits is that it's harder for a grassroots group or a new candidate to mount an effective campaign because the incumbent is often entrenched with donors. Because of campaign time expenditure limits and filing deadlines, Representative Schrage said that most challengers don't challenge an incumbent until the year of an election [a 12-month period], whereas an incumbent can mount a more effective campaign due to their capacity to fundraise during campaign's entire run time and in the year prior [typically an 18-month period]. By going to a per election cycle model, Representative Schrage said HB 16 would improve the chances, from a judicial perspective, for challengers to mount an effective campaign against an incumbent.

CHAIR CARRICK asked Representative Schrage to clarify that HB 16 has no limits to the other ways individuals can contribute to candidates' campaigns including contributions from PACs and voluntary time contributions. She raised a concern that by not including limits on such contributions, it could lead to candidates having an outsized presence within an election cycle.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that this understanding was correct and there are multiple ways to contribute to a campaign, including phone calls and volunteering, and for these contributions, there were no limits within HB 16. Other ways for candidates to ensure that they can effectively utilize their assets include donations to their campaigns, PACs, and independent expenditure groups and establishing their own independent expenditure groups, but HB 16 would limit only direct contributions from individuals to candidates.

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CHAIR CARRICK asked Representative Schrage if this legislation would impact how much an individual can give to their own campaign.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said it would not.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND talked about how not having unlimited amounts of money would change ideas about voter engagement and the effects such measures would have on the exercise of free speech. Representative Holland then said he was curious as to whether, if the legislature were to pass HB 16 and it were to be signed into law during the current session, there was a need for some sort of implementation plan for how limits on campaign contributions would phase in. He indicated there were concerns surrounding limits to campaign donations from previous election cycles. He brought up the previously mentioned 18-month campaigning for incumbent candidates and when that would begin for the 2026 election. He stated support for HB 16, as well as concern that it does not get "tangled up" and end up unusable.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said the concerns raised by Representative Holland were good concerns, as HB 16 would not change the amount that can be carried over from donations to a previous campaign. Representative Schrage stated that because a campaign initiation cannot take place until 18 months prior to an election, no one that would be campaigning for the 2026 election would be receiving funds for their campaigns until summer of 2025. Therefore, according to Representative Schrage, the legislature would need to look at the effective date of HB 16, because if it were to be passed at the end of the current session, there would be an impetus to make sure there was no interference in the 2026 election. Representative Schrage added that the most likely candidates that would begin fundraising for the 2026 election in the summer of 2025 would likely be incumbent members of the legislature and thus would be aware of the changes in statute should HB 16 pass.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE, in reference to Chair Carrick's question on the effects of the law on non-traditional candidates as it pertains to campaign drives, commented on her experience as a first-time candidate. She was under 40 years old at the time and started raising money from local constituents, as she assumed everyone else did, due to a lack of funds on her part. While she defeated a 16-year incumbent, her campaign was difficult because she did not have the advantage and her opponent had connections and a considerable amount of money. She added that most of her opponents have outraised her

significantly, with PACs, independent expenditure groups, and "a variety of connections of donors." She said that in describing her experience as a candidate, she does not want Alaskans who are considering running for office to "feel that they are at a disadvantage by their age, by the location of where they're at, or who they may know." Further elaborating on the reasons for her statement and how it impacts her support for the bill, she stated she thinks that Alaskans are still very much a grassroots community when it comes to electing people to represent them. She said, "It's a matter of how much you listen to your people and get out there and work for it." She acknowledged the level of in terms of how candidates are receiving money and the outside influence.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said she would be looking at the case law surrounding campaign contribution limits, as there have been several cases surrounding that issue. She said that she ultimately concurred with Representative Schrage in bringing HB 16 to the legislature, because enacting limits on campaign contributions "is part of the trust that people want in our election process." She underscored the lack of trust, remarking that a lot of legislators probably deal with the accusations that we're "bought" and that we have handlers. She stated "That's heartbreaking to me because I know all of us try to have that ... trust within our constituency."

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE further stated that the ability for the legislature to regulate campaign contributions in a way that can pass legal scrutiny is very important. However, she said she doesn't want the legislature to do so in a way that weighs an advantage "to one side over another," which she said there is a perception that HB 16 would have that effect. She further stated that individuals with no money can engage in Alaska's system "because we are so local."

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE stated that he agreed with every word that Representative Vance said. To illustrate his point, Representative Schrage shared that as someone that went out and collected signatures for the ballot initiative, countless times he heard people call politicians corrupt, to which he would ask if they were sure about that, noting that he is of the elected officials, who works really hard to represent his constituents. Thus, the subject of campaign contribution limits was something that he believed should be addressed by the legislature through HB 16. In reference to Mike Coon's statement entered into the record, Representative Schrage also stated that he introduced the bill during his first legislative session. He said this

issue has nothing to do with the current political environment, what's happening on a local or national level. It is a response to a court striking down campaign limits that Alaskans have repeatedly voted for. The proposed legislation seeks to honor Alaskans and their will and keep these campaign contribution limits in place but adjust them "to withstand legal scrutiny."

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE further emphasized his anticipation regarding working with Representative Vance on HB 16. He continued by elaborating on his personal experience of entering politics saying, "I never thought I was going to do it. I didn't have the connections, I didn't have big donations." and talked at length about his work knocking on doors and in taking a grass roots initiative. He further stated that, in his experience, incumbents have better access to donors, since according to him it was easier to get donations after he became an elected official. Representative Schrage said that the \$2,000 limit proposed in HB 16 is hard to get for first-time candidates and that the lower the limit is, the better it is for a challenger, for a first-time candidate.

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CHAIR CARRICK said that she agreed with both statements made by Representative Vance and Representative Schrage, particularly with Representative Vance's statement about outside monied influence and the importance of talking about and addressing it. Chair Carrick said that she sees this legislation as something that should be brought forward either in its current form or with amendments. She said that since members of the legislature have unique experiences, Representative Schrage's comments on his first race resonated with her; as she was in the first five way open primary and she, as a 30-year-old woman, beat all of the men in her race, a couple of which had more money, and one of whom had four times the money from individual and PAC donations. She said this was a hard task. Because of that experience, she would like to see downward pressure on the size of campaign donations, as presented in HB 16.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that the issue of campaign contribution limits is important. To illustrate her point, she said that her district would likely not have \$2,000 donors. However, because the expense of campaigning in her district is immense. Representative Himschoot continued:

I look at this and I'm like \$2,000 would be wonderful; I'd be amazed to get that kind of contribution. But the group donations mattered a lot to me too. So,...I just always have to speak up as someone who campaigns in a very rural place where the only way to do it is small planes; if I'm lucky there's a ferry, usually not; ...hotels sometimes ... yeah; it's just immensely expensive to campaign in my district.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT further said that she doesn't see HB 16 working against her, and that the legislature needed to work to build trust in Alaska's elections. However, because of the unique challenges Representative Himschoot faces in campaigning in her district, she must consider where her contributions come from locally.

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CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 16 was held over.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:19 p.m.