

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 4, 2025

3:33 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Vice Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Robert Yundt

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ANDVSA- ALASKA'S SUPPORT FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING
SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 40

"An Act establishing the period between September 15 and October
15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month."

- MOVED SB 40 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10

Encouraging the United States Congress to award Hmong veterans
of the Vietnam War the Congressional Gold Medal.

- MOVED SJR 10 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 6

Supporting the admittance of Washington, D.C., into the Union as
a state of the United States of America.

- MOVED SJR 6 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1

Relating to the procedure that the Thirty-Fourth Alaska State
Legislature will use to reconsider bills and items vetoed by the
governor.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 40

SHORT TITLE: HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GRAY-JACKSON

01/17/25	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/17/25
01/22/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(S)	STA
02/25/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/25/25	(S)	Heard & Held
02/25/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/04/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SJR 10

SHORT TITLE: HMONG VETERANS; CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) WIELECHOWSKI

02/20/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/25	(S)	STA
02/25/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/25/25	(S)	Heard & Held
02/25/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/04/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SJR 6

SHORT TITLE: WASHINGTON D.C. STATEHOOD

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) TOBIN

01/24/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25	(S)	STA, JUD
02/25/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/25/25	(S)	Heard & Held
02/25/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/04/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SCR 1

SHORT TITLE: ART. II, SEC. 16, CONST: VETO RECON

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) CLAMAN

01/24/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25	(S)	STA, JUD
03/04/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

BRENDA STANFILL, Executive Director
Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided slides on Alaska's support for those experiencing sexual and domestic violence.

KEELEY OLSON, Executive Director
Standing Together Against Rape (STAR)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided slides on Alaska's support for those experiencing sexual and domestic violence.

RANDI BREAGER, Executive Director
Alaska Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided slides on Alaska's support for those experiencing sexual and domestic violence.

EILEEN ARNOLD, Executive Director
Tundra Women's Coalition (TWC)
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided slides on Alaska's support for those experiencing sexual and domestic violence.

JOSHUA MCHOES, Staff
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 10.

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID NELSON, District 18
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 10.

MIKE MASON, Staff
Senator Loki Tobin
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a recap for SJR 6.

WENDY HAMILTON, Reverend
Washington, D.C.

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SJR 6.

SENATOR MATT CLAMAN, District H
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SCR 1.

DOUG GARDNER, representing self
Olympia, Washington
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SCR 1.

ED MARTIN, representing self
Kenai, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SCR 1.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:33:50 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON, acting as chair, called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:33 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Gray-Jackson, and Yundt. Senator Wielechowski and Chair Kawasaki arrived shortly thereafter.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON handed the gavel to Vice Chair Bjorkman at 3:34 p.m.

PRESENTATION: ANDVSA- ALASKA'S SUPPORT FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

[3:35:33 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the Presentation: ANDVSA- Alaska's Support for Those Experiencing Sexual and Domestic Violence.

[3:35:50 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI and Senator Wielechowski joined the meeting.

[3:36:05 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR BJORKMAN handed the gavel to Chair Kawasaki.

[3:36:24 PM](#)

BRENDA STANFILL, Executive Director, Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA), Juneau, Alaska, provided a presentation on Alaska's Support for those Experiencing Sexual and Domestic Violence and moved to slide 3, History of the Movement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

History of the Movement

1976 - concerned women who saw the need for services for battered women and victims of rape established the Alaska Women's Resource Center in Anchorage- Rape rates in Alaska were 2x that of the US average. Domestic violence was not yet a crime.

1977 - State's first shelter was established in Anchorage - followed by Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Nome, Bethel, Kodiak, and Ketchikan.

1980 - Formed the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault - Non-profit membership organization made up of direct service providers.

1981- In Alaska, general funds for shelters increased to 1.8 million and the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault was formed - first statutory purpose - create, support and maintain direct service providers across the state to assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Mid 1990's - Criminalization of DV, Mandatory arrest laws, and passage of first Violence Against Women act in Congress.

[3:39:46 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 4, Why Safe Shelter and Supports, and stated that safe shelters were started because domestic violence was deadly for both women and men. She said in 1975, men and women were dying at similar rates, sometimes victims acted in self-defense. She stated that when shelters opened, male deaths declined, likely because victims had an alternative to violence. Women's deaths didn't drop until the 1990s, when accountability measures were added. The lesson: one strategy isn't enough; multiple approaches are needed.

[3:40:51 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 5, Not all Domestic Violence is a criminal act and stated that her agency found that not all domestic violence is criminal. Tactics like emotional or economic abuse, denial, and blame, known as coercive control, aren't crimes on their own but are still harmful. She said while police can't act, support agencies can help those affected.

[3:41:31 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 6 and stated that only about 30 percent of domestic violence victims report domestic violence and 70 percent don't report domestic violence, but many victims seek help from support programs.

[3:41:46 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 7 and stated that from ANDVSA's experience, the agency learned that providing shelter and support is only part of the solution. She said to truly reduce violence, people must also focus on accountability and prevention approaches that proved effective during the five-year Choose Respect campaign.

[3:42:11 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 8, Changes Over Time 2010-2020, and stated that in 2010, a needs assessment showed where ANDVSA stood on intimate partner violence. By 2015, focused efforts in intervention, prevention, and accountability reduced lifetime rates from 47.6 percent to 40.4 percent, and the past-year rates dropped from 9.4 percent to 6.4 percent. She said that after 2015 top-level support for the Choose Respect campaign faded and slowed. Although past-year rates rose slightly in the 2020 assessment, overall there was steady proof that continued intervention helps maintain gains.

[3:43:30 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 9 and showed a map of the 24 providers of safe and support shelters in Alaska.

[3:43:42 PM](#)

MS. STANFILL moved to slide 10 and stated that the list shows all of the services the safe shelters provide.

[3:43:58 PM](#)

KEELEY OLSON, Executive Director, Standing Together Against Rape (STAR), Anchorage, Alaska, presented informational slides on STAR and moved to slide 11. She said at the core of STAR's program is a 24/7 statewide sexual assault crisis line. STAR provides crisis intervention, advocacy, long-term support, counseling, and case management. She said while STAR also offers community prevention and education, today's focus is on intervention.

[3:44:31 PM](#)

MS. OLSON moved to slide 12, Crisis Line, and stated that the crisis line is staffed by STAR staff during business hours and by trained volunteers after hours, weekends, and holidays. STAR

has 39 active volunteers with some having over 20 years of experience, who provide support, resources, referrals, and help connect with community partners.

3:45:14 PM

MS. OLSON moved to slide 13, Who Calls the Crisis Line, and stated that the crisis line is used by survivors, loved ones, potential and current clients, law enforcement, nurses, clinics, ER staff, counselors, and community partners seeking support or next steps for getting more support. The crisis line is also a key contact point for the staff of STAR.

3:45:49 PM

MS. OLSON moved to slide 14, What is a SART, and stated that STAR's coordinated community response, called Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), includes law enforcement, forensic nurses, and advocacy. She said in Anchorage, that's typically APD, troopers, or military police, with nursing services from Providence and STAR. STAR also offers anonymous reporting, required by Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) since 2009-2010, for survivors uncomfortable about reporting assault. Forensic evidence may be collected within 7 days and preserved, allowing survivors to decide later whether to involve law enforcement. She said STAR explains the pros and cons of reporting options. She said victim's are informed that there are three crime scenes - the victim's body, the location of the assault, and the offender's body- and that waiting to report can result in loss of evidence. She stated that viable prosecutions have occurred through anonymous victim reporting (AVR). AVR allows advocacy to wrap services around the survivor.

3:48:38 PM

MS. OLSON moved to slide 15, Direct Services Advocacy, and stated that STAR's advocacy services include personalized safety planning, legal support (both civil and criminal), counseling, and financial aid. STAR helps with protective orders, court accompaniment, and connect clients to pro bono legal help, housing support, and more. For criminal cases, STAR attends all key court events. She said STAR offers one-on-one sessions, support through reporting, and emergency aid-like fixing damage from an assailant or covering rent if the primary earner is arrested. She stated that all services are client-driven and focused on helping them meet their goals.

3:51:17 PM

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated that some of his constituents have contacted him with concerns about trial delays. The constituents

have been victims in some form, and communication with prosecutors has been inconsistent. He inquired about STAR's experience regarding individuals encountering delayed justice from the department of law and the courts.

[3:51:57 PM](#)

MS. OLSON answered that pretrial delays are a serious concern. Despite research and recommendations, none have been implemented, mostly due to defense requests. She said delays hurt evidence and victims, only the defendant benefits. She said as recent reports show people and witnesses can die waiting for justice, and key investigators may retire or move, weakening the case.

[3:53:16 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if the trial delays are requested by defense counsel.

[3:53:28 PM](#)

MS. OLSON answered yes.

[3:53:31 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked who made the suggestions from the studies and are the suggestions listed in a report somewhere.

[3:53:43 PM](#)

MS. OLSON answered that the suggestions are in the Phoenix Report, presented to the State Justice Commission in 2009 and, she believes the report is funded by the state. She said other studies may exist, but that's the primary one.

[3:54:15 PM](#)

MS. OLSON moved to slides 16 and 17, Direct Services Advocacy Data FY24, and stated that last year, STAR served 542 people, with numbers rising this year. She said of those people 439 were on-scene crisis responses through SART, anonymous reporting, or ER visits when patients were too injured to transfer to a STAR facility. She said each case averages six to eight hours of response time. STAR focuses on client choice and empowerment throughout the process. With just six full-time and 11 on-call advocates available 24/7, it's a heavy workload. STAR also provides ongoing case management and legal advocacy, including court support and crisis line follow-up.

[3:56:26 PM](#)

RANDI BREAGER, Executive Director, Alaska Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC), Anchorage, Alaska, presented informational slides on

AWAIC. She stated that Domestic violence advocacy in Alaska is mostly community-based, meaning AWAIC supports victims directly, separate from the criminal justice system. Unlike prosecutors, who focus on public safety, AWAIC offers confidential support protected by state law. AWAIC meets basic needs like housing, food, and childcare to help victims stay safe and engaged in long legal processes. In Anchorage, STAR handles sexual violence, and AWAIC handles domestic violence, unlike other areas where programs cover both.

[3:59:41 PM](#)

MS. BREAGER moved to slide 19, Mission, and stated that AWAIC's mission is to provide domestic violence safe shelter, intervention, and prevention.

[4:00:00 PM](#)

MS. BREAGER moved to slide 20, AWAIC History and Services, and stated that last year, over 1,000 people came through AWAIC's doors, and AWAIC provided nearly 16,000 safe bed nights. Another 320 received services like transitional housing, legal advocacy, and other support.

[4:00:37 PM](#)

MS. BREAGER moved to slide 21, AWAIC services and stated that AWAIC has a full range of services, starting with low-barrier emergency shelter. As clients heal, they can move to transitional housing like Harmony House or, if chosen, permanent independent housing. She said she is the incoming board vice-president VP of Alaska Society of Prevention to the Cruelty of Animals (SPCA) because of the link between animal abuse and domestic violence. AWAIC runs a safe haven housing program for pets, since children and pets often influence victims' decisions to stay or leave abusive homes. She said besides housing, AWAIC provides a 24-hour crisis line, education, support groups, counseling referrals, case management (even without shelter residency), and financial aid. She said AWAIC's Alaska Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Intervention Program (ADVSAIP), partnered with the Municipal Prosecutor's Office, to help keep victims engaged in the criminal justice system by meeting basic needs.

[4:02:50 PM](#)

MS. BREAGER moved to slide 22, Funding Sources FY25 Budget, and stated that she wanted to note AWAIC's funding is different from other state programs with mostly federal pass-through grants, making up 71 percent of the budget. She said any federal funding issues greatly impact AWAIC.

[4:03:45 PM](#)

EILEEN ARNOLD, Executive Director, Tundra Women's Coalition (TWC), Bethel, Alaska, provided slides on TWC information. She stated that TWC is a dual domestic violence and sexual assault agency servicing the Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) Delta region.

[4:04:08 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 24, History, and stated that TWC provides all the same services as urban programs just with the added challenges of running the program in rural areas, which are harder, costlier, and more complex. TWC also has a children's advocacy center. She said TWC has operated since 1978, starting in a Quonset hut. In 2009, TWC built the largest Alaska shelter that is secure, comfortable and has space for 43 people to accommodate the higher rates of domestic and sexual violence in Western Alaska.

[4:05:13 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 25, Classic Services, and stated that TWC offers core services like shelter, on average 10,000 nights a year, transitional housing, and a multi-disciplinary team for adult and child sexual assault cases, that include about 60-70 adults and 200+ youth cases annually. She said the legal advocacy program supports around 140 people with protective orders, court help, and the Violent Crimes Compensation Board (VCCB). As a community-based organization, TWC adapts to what the community and survivors need. TWC is proud to have supported children through their programs, into teenage years, and eventually hired them as staff. TWC's services grow based on identified needs.

[4:06:29 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 26, Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), and stated that typically, survivors must travel to Bethel for care. To reduce that burden, TWC expanded services to five larger villages, so people don't have to choose between catching a flight or preserving evidence in poor weather. Through Tel-a-SAFE and sub-regional clinics, TWC is improving access, though staffing remains a challenge. She said TWC also responds to frequent strangulation cases and has two on-site clinics: one for Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) medical needs, especially for village children who lack regular care, and another for shelter residents. CAC offers private, convenient care, especially valuable in a small community where going to the hospital can feel unsafe or embarrassing. She stated that staff and their children also use this service.

[4:08:28 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 27 and stated that TWC prioritizes input from those who've used their services to shape how TWC designs and improves them.

[4:08:55 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 28 and stated that TWC focuses heavily on healing, since TWC can't control whether cases are reported, charged, or prosecuted. TWC has invested in wellness, with an on-site clinician available for drop-ins. TWC also offers subsistence activities like hunting, fishing, sewing, and gathering. These activities provide comfort, connection, and a chance to heal and thrive beyond victimization. The activities are among the most popular and meaningful services.

[4:09:56 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 29 and stated that many choose a violent relationship over homelessness. She said TWC has seen people return to the shelter repeatedly due to lack of options, so TWC invested in solutions. TWC broke ground on permanent supportive housing and opened the Tundra Youth Home for ages 18-24. The housings first model worked with the local jail reporting repeat inmates not returning to jail after moving into stable housing. As a community-based agency, TWC serves their own families and neighbors. That's why TWC builds housing to reduce harm and meet real, local needs with compassion and purpose.

[4:11:34 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 30 and stated that TWC runs a thrift store, reflecting Bethel's high cost of living. The thrift store started in a small blue shack and now operates in a slightly better gray one. She said the thrift store is widely used by the whole community, including doctors who are looking for affordable items like jackets left behind by others who've moved away.

[4:12:08 PM](#)

MS. ARNOLD moved to slide 31 and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

A Snapshot: April 7th, 2024 from Midnight to Midnight

- 17 women and 24 children in our shelter,
- Transitional housing for three women six children,

- Three non-resident adults with three children were helped with housing vouchers,
- One survivor of sexual assault got updates on her legal case from our staff,
- 8 youth attended our TAV program.
- 28 cases were reviewed by the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) member at the CAC case review.
- A SART call out happened at five o'clock.
- Local law enforcement dropped off a mom with a baby at the shelter around 11 o'clock PM.
- And 12 full time staff came to work, and eight of whom are survivors of interpersonal violence themselves.

4:13:16 PM

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked what Telesafe does.

4:13:30 PM

MS. ARNOLD answered that TWC received a federal grant from the Office of Victims of Crime, joining three other states in addressing a national issue: many hospitals lack trained forensic examiners. She said in sub-regional clinics TWC placed a picture taking device called Cortex Flow so Bethel providers can remotely guide evidence collection. The challenge is staffing with only a few medical providers wanting to live in remote areas. She said now TWC is training itinerant providers to carry mobile units when visiting villages, so providers can collect evidence if an assault occurs. She said this approach helps overcome travel barriers that often prevent survivors from reporting.

4:15:17 PM

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that regarding funding, one of the earlier slides showed about 40 percent funding from federal sources, 30 percent from the state, and the rest from local government or smaller contributions. He asked if ANDVSA knows what the next few years looks like for filling the gaps caused by limited funding.

4:15:59 PM

MS. STANFILL answered that right now, federal funding is uncertain, but grants ADNVA normally applies for in March aren't even open to be written. She said in a typical year, victim services funding in Alaska has sharply declined from \$9.5 million to about \$2 million. While the state added \$3.7 million last year to the general fund, ADNVA still faces a \$4.2 million shortfall next year to fund the core services. She said this is

a 25 percent cut, which many programs can't survive. She said the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault may be forced to close some of the 24 existing programs. Since ANDVSA isn't asking for funding this year, so there maybe support for the Child Advocacy Centers that are struggling. ANDVSA hopes to seek funding help next year.

[4:19:16 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 40-HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

[4:20:54 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 40 "An Act establishing the period between September 15 and October 15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month."

[4:22:47 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[4:22:51 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to report SB 40, work order 34-LS0077\N, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[4:23:10 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and SB 40 was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

SJR 10-HMONG VETERANS; CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

[4:23:29 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10 Encouraging the United States Congress to award Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War the Congressional Gold Medal.

[4:23:53 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that SJR 10 urges Congress to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War, similar to the recognition given to Filipino World War II veterans for their bravery and sacrifice. SJR 10 outlines the details of why the State of Alaska should honor the Hmong veterans. He stated that SJR 10 is a bipartisan effort at both the state and federal levels.

[4:24:44 PM](#)

JOSHUA MCHOES, Staff, Senator Bill Wielechowski, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 10 and stated his belief that the Congressional Gold Medal is well deserved. Hmong veterans made a significant contribution to the U.S., and the Hmong community in Alaska is vibrant, active, and deeply engaged in supporting both Anchorage and their own members.

[4:25:18 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SJR 10.

[4:25:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID NELSON, District 18, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 10 and stated that the sacrifices of Hmong veterans during the Vietnam War were vital to U.S. efforts and must not be overlooked. He said after the war, many faced brutal retaliation from a north Vietnamese army, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee as refugees. He said 50,000 now live in the U.S., including many in Alaska, which has the third-largest Hmong population. These veterans and their families continue to preserve their culture and contribute to society. He stated that honoring them with the Congressional Gold Medal is a bipartisan, bicameral effort that recognizes their legacy. Alaska has long acknowledged their service, including designating May 15 as Hmong American Veterans Day.

[4:28:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI closed public testimony on SJR 10.

[4:28:16 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[4:28:19 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to report SJR 10, work order 34-LS0618\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[4:28:37 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and SJR 10 was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

SJR 6-WASHINGTON D.C. STATEHOOD

[4:29:00 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 6 Supporting the admittance of Washington, D.C., into the Union as a state of the United States of America.

[4:29:23 PM](#)

MIKE MASON, Staff, Senator Loki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided a recap of SJR 6 and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The people that live in our nation's capital have many of the same rights as you and I. However, they don't have all the same rights. Senate Joint Resolution 6 seeks to change that.

Right now, the people of Washington, D.C. pay more in federal taxes per capita than any other state in the Union despite that fact that they are not fully represented in Congress. If taxation without representation is wrong, then the people of Washington, D.C. are being wronged.

Right now, the people of Alaska are represented by two U.S. Senators. The people of Washington, D.C. have no representation in the U.S. Senate. Right now, the people of Alaska are represented in the U.S. House of Representatives by a single congressperson with all the rights and responsibilities of a member of Congress. Thanks to legislation passed in 1970, the people of Washington, D.C. are allowed to send a delegate to Congress. However, that person does not get to vote on bills, resolutions, and other matters before Congress. All they can do is talk.

I believe the will of the people that live in Washington, D.C. is missing from the deliberations and decisions made in the U.S. Congress. As a result, the roughly 700,000 people that live in the District of Columbia are disenfranchised from our federal government despite that fact that they live in and around the seat of the federal government.

[4:31:08 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited and public testimony on SJR 6.

[4:31:31 PM](#)

WENDY HAMILTON, Reverend, Washington D.C., testified by invitation on SJR 6 and stated that this legislation would give representation in Congress to the 700,000 hardworking, taxpaying residents of Washington, D.C. She stated that D.C is her home, she lives, works, volunteers, and raises her family in D.C., like many others who contribute to the vibrant community. Yet, D.C. residents have no vote in Congress, despite paying more federal taxes per capita than any state and having a larger population than Vermont or Wyoming. She said the local laws and the budget can be overturned by Congress, which often uses D.C. for political battles. D.C. residents have fought in every U.S. war but still lack full representation. This isn't about partisanship; it's about fairness and democracy. She stated that D.C. isn't asking for anything special, just the same representation every other state enjoys. D.C. statehood is about giving a voice to Americans who have been denied their voice for too long.

[4:37:19 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated that Washington, D.C. was originally designed as a square, spanning both sides of the Potomac River. He asked why Washing D.C is no longer a square and why didn't Virginia provide the portion of land as originally intended for the capital.

[4:38:07 PM](#)

MS. HAMILTON answered her belief that the founders never expected hundreds of thousands of people to permanently live in D.C. but as the population grew, it became clear that D.C. had to account for those residents outside the federal district. She said what D.C. is asking for now is representation for those residents, while still preserving the federal district itself.

[4:38:45 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether it would be acceptable for Washington, D.C. residents to gain congressional representation by becoming part of Maryland, similar to how the Virginia portion of D.C. was returned to that state.

[4:39:09 PM](#)

MS. HAMILTON answered that Maryland is not interested in having Washington D.C. merge with the state of Maryland. She restated her previous testimony.

[4:41:32 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI closed invited and public testimony on SJR 6.

[4:41:46 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether there are any other United States citizens that pay federal taxes but aren't represented in Congress.

[4:41:57 PM](#)

MR. MASON answered the United States citizens in Puerto Rico.

[4:42:30 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[4:42:38 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON moved to report SJR 6, work order 34-LS0263\N, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[4:42:52 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN objected.

[4:42:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found the objection was maintained and asked for a roll call vote.

[4:43:21 PM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Senators Gray-Jackson, Wielechowski and Kawasaki voted in favor of moving SJR 6 and Senators Bjorkman and Yundt voted against it. The vote was 3:2.

[4:44:22 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced that SJR 6 was reported from committee on a vote of 3 yeas and 2 nays.

#

[4:44:34 PM](#)

At ease.

SCR 1-ART. II, SEC. 16, CONST: VETO RECON

[4:45:12 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1 Relating to the procedure that the Thirty-Fourth Alaska State Legislature will use to reconsider bills and items vetoed by the governor.

[4:45:37 PM](#)

SENATOR MATT CLAMAN, District H, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SCR 1, introduced his legislation:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Concurrent Resolution 1 relates to Article II, Section 16 of the Alaska Constitution, which is the section that governs the legislature's "action upon veto," to use the formal title of the section.

This resolution originated in January of 2024, following the Governor's veto of \$87 million in public education funding from the FY 24 budget in June of 2023. Upon convening the second session of the 32nd legislature, the House of Representatives voted not to convene a joint session to consider overriding that veto. It has been the Legislature's general practice for each chamber to vote on whether or not to convene a joint session to consider overriding a veto. The Alaska Constitution, however, lays out a different, straightforward procedure.

Legal research often ends in ambiguous and unclear territory, where there is no one correct interpretation of a statute or constitutional provision, and advocates might reasonably argue either side.

With regard to Legislative procedure following a veto, however, there is only one sensible answer. Here, there is complete consistency between the explicit language of the constitution, the constitutional convention minutes explaining the intent of the framers, and the rules and practices adopted by the very first legislature, which included some people who had been delegates to the constitutional convention, who therefore had a unique understanding of what the framers intended the legislature to do in response to a veto.

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SENATOR CLAMAN continued with the introduction of SCR 1:

Article II, Section 16 of the Constitution, states explicitly: "Upon receipt of a veto message during a regular session of the legislature, the legislature

shall meet immediately in joint session and reconsider passage of the vetoed bill or item."

Later sentences address what happens if the legislature is not in session when the Governor vetoes a bill. They provide that, if that legislature reconvenes in either a regular or special session, the legislature *shall* reconsider the vetoed bill in joint session no later than the fifth day after reconvening. This language was the result of a 1976 amendment to the Alaska Constitution.

The constitutional language *requires* the legislature to meet in joint session. There is no discretion to refuse to meet.

Further, the constitution requires the joint session to be held promptly - "immediately" if the legislature is in session when the Governor delivers a veto and "within five days of reconvening" if the legislature is not in session when the Governor delivers the veto.

The only question is what exactly does "immediately" mean. There is no definitive answer to that question - but the constitutional language and the constitutional convention minutes suggest some guidelines.

At one extreme, the framers did not intend to require both houses to literally drop everything and move immediately into joint session. But the framers meant the legislature to hold that joint session promptly, without undue delay. The first legislature, dealing with the first vetoes, met in joint session on the same day the Governor delivered the vetoes.

An outside limit for what could be considered prompt enough to meet the spirit of the constitutional requirement of "immediately" is suggested by the five-day limit for meeting in joint session if the legislature has adjourned and needs to reconvene for the next regular or special session.

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SENATOR CLAMAN continued with the introduction of SCR 1:

The last point I want to make is that all of this analysis is consistent with this legislature's current Uniform Rule 45. This is the rule titled "Vetoed Bills." It provides that, after the governor returns a vetoed bill with his objections to the house of origin while the legislature is in session, that house shall note the veto message in its journal and then "the other house is promptly requested to meet in joint session to reconsider passage of the vetoed bill or item."

If the legislature is not in session when Governor delivers the veto, Rule 45 tracks the constitution and states that the Legislature must consider the bill in joint session within five days of that legislature's reconvening in a regular or special session.

I understand that in the recent past, the legislature sometimes has turned to Uniform Rule 51, rather than Rule 45, for procedures on responding to a veto. That is a mistake. Rule 51 is a general rule on joint sessions - and it provides for how a joint session *may* be called by agreement of the presiding officer of both houses or by a majority of one house.

It is well accepted in law that a more specific rule controls over a general rule, which is why it is a mistake to be guided by the general rule on calling a joint session instead of the very specific rule - Rule 45 - which is written precisely to define the legislature's required procedure in response to a vetoed bill.

The legislature has taken different approaches in the past about how to proceed following a governor's veto. Alaskans deserve to have predictability and certainty regarding the process to override a veto. SCR 13 will establish consistency and clarity for all Alaskans and ensure that the legislature carefully considers all vetoes moving forward. The resolution addresses how we address reconsideration of the governor's vetoes under Article II, Section 16 of the Alaska Constitution.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI opened invited and public testimony on SCR 1.

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DOUG GARDNER, representing self, Olympia, Washington, testified by invitation on SCR 1 and stated that he can't predict how the Supreme Court would rule, but he opined there's a strong likelihood the Supreme Court would interpret "shall immediately" to mean immediate action, as defined in the legislative drafting manual and reflected in 1959 constitutional convention minutes. The intent was for both chambers to meet in joint session promptly after a veto to consider an override. He stated that this differs from today's Uniform Rule 51 process, which allows either chamber to block a joint session. The framers of the 1959 constitutional convention minutes wanted to ensure legislators who supported a bill would have a chance to amend or revive a bill post-veto, rather than have a bill die due to inaction. He said his memo (available on the documents page) covers this in more detail. He stated his belief that the 1959 Senate Rules Committee ruling, authored by constitutional delegates themselves, carries significant weight and affirms this interpretation. He said that precedent has eroded over time, what he called a "legislative procedural migration" but the original intent was clear. He stated that after researching and reviewing the historical context and precedent, it's his opinion that a court would likely rule that the legislature is obligated to meet in joint session immediately after a veto, as originally intended.

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ED MARTIN, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified with concerns on SCR 1 and stated that the Constitution clearly says "shall immediately," and ignoring that is a failure to uphold the oath of office. This isn't just about one issue, it's happening across all levels of government. He said he's tired of officials sitting back while the Constitution is sidestepped. He stated that there doesn't need to be more clarification and the law is clear. He said it's time to honor the oath, follow the Constitution, and act before trust is lost completely.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI closed invited and public testimony on SCR 1.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI held SCR 1 in committee.

[5:04:28 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 5:04 p.m.