

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 27, 2025

3:31 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

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

SENATOR KELLY MERRICK (via teleconference)

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 64

"An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 64(STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 77

"An Act relating to national criminal history record checks for certain employees of the Department of Revenue; relating to allowable absences for eligibility for a permanent fund dividend; relating to the confidentiality of certain information provided on a permanent fund dividend application; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 116

"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: SB 64

SHORT TITLE: ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): RULES

01/24/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25	(S)	STA, FIN
01/30/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/30/25	(S)	Heard & Held
01/30/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
02/04/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/04/25	(S)	Heard & Held
02/04/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/11/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/11/25	(S)	Heard & Held
03/11/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/13/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/13/25	(S)	Heard & Held
03/13/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/18/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/18/25	(S)	Heard & Held
03/18/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/20/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/20/25	(S)	Heard & Held
03/20/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/25/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/25/25	(S)	Heard & Held
03/25/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/27/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 77

SHORT TITLE: PERM FUND; EMPLOYMENT; ELIGIBILITY

SPONSOR(s): KIEHL

01/27/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/27/25	(S)	L&C, STA
02/03/25	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

02/03/25 (S) Heard & Held
 02/03/25 (S) MINUTE(L&C)
 02/07/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 02/07/25 (S) Moved SB 77 Out of Committee
 02/07/25 (S) MINUTE(L&C)
 02/10/25 (S) L&C RPT 3DP 2NR
 02/10/25 (S) DP: BJORKMAN, DUNBAR, GRAY-JACKSON
 02/10/25 (S) NR: MERRICK, YUNDT
 03/27/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 116

SHORT TITLE: CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

SPONSOR(s): STATE AFFAIRS

03/05/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 03/05/25 (S) STA, FIN
 03/27/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

MAXINE LABERGE, Staff
 Senator Bill Wielechowski
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the summary of changes from version T to version O of SB 64.

ALEX KOPLIN, representing self
 Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

ROBERT WELTON, representing self
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 64.

CAROL BEECHER, Director
 Division of Elections
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 64.

SONJA KAWASAKI, Assistant
 Senate Majority Legal Counsel
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 64.

SENATOR JESSE KIEHL, District B

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 77.

CATHY SCHLINGHEYDE, Staff
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 77.

BEVERLY WOOLEY, representing self
Big Lake, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 77.

KATI CAPOZZI, President
Alaska Chamber of Commerce
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 77.

JOE HAYES, Staff
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 116.

PAT RACE, representing self
Citizens Against Money in Politics (CAMP)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 116.

SHARMAN HALEY, Activist
Alaska Move to Amend
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 116.

CAROLINE STORM, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 116.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:42 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Gray-Jackson, Yundt and Chair Kawasaki.

SB 64-ELECTIONS

[3:32:24 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 64 "An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:42 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited a motion.

[3:32:46 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 64, work order 34-LS0153\0, as the working document.

[3:33:02 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:33:32 PM](#)

MAXINE LABERGE, Staff, Senator Bill Wielechowski, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the summary of changes from version T to version O of SB 64:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Summary of Changes Draft CS Version T to Draft CS
Version O

The following provisions were **added** to the bill:

- Section 1, subsection 9 & section 25 clarify that voters will have their ballot counted for the races they are still eligible to vote in if they vote in a district which includes their former voting residence.
- In Section 6, subsection 4 & Section 10, subsections (i)-(l): additional voter roll cleanup procedures were added to require notices be sent to voters whose permanent mailing address in Division records has been outside of Alaska for at least two years. These notices will give the voters the opportunity to confirm they are

still Alaska residents, cancel their registration, or move to federal only status.

- In Section 10 the following subsections were added:
 - Subsection (g) requires the Division to adopt regulations to conduct a review of the voter register.
 - Subsection (h) requires the Division to consult with an expert to conduct a review of the voter register and to submit a report to the Legislature.

The following **changes** were made to existing provisions in the bill:

- In Section 38 the existing ballot tracking language is replaced with provisions that can be implemented by the Division.
- In Section 1 clarifications are made to the definition of residency.

[3:35:25 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI removed his objection. He found no further objection and CSSB 64 was adopted as the working document.

[3:36:20 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 64.

[3:36:38 PM](#)

ALEX KOPLIN, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64 and stated that he supports ballot curing, witness signatures, and prepaid envelopes. He stressed the importance of protecting voting access, noting that voters can make mistakes and should still have their votes counted. He said while the overall proposal is complex, he believes passing at least one reform this year would be a big step forward and could lay the groundwork for future improvements before the next election.

[3:38:57 PM](#)

ROBERT WELTON, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 64 and discussed Section 42 of version T, which requires the lieutenant governor to create a cybersecurity program for voter registration records. He stated that he is supportive of stronger security but had two concerns: First, cybersecurity should be managed by a nonpartisan election official, not the lieutenant governor, to avoid political

influence and mistrust. Second, the scope is too narrow, covering only voter registration records, and should also include vote tabulation systems. He said he supports expanding cybersecurity but suggested shifting responsibility to the Division of Elections.

[3:41:27 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI closed public testimony on SB 64.

[3:41:38 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that the committee has discussed how the division can make sure ballots are properly tracked. Since some legislators see ballot tracking as essential to knowing exactly where a ballot is in the process, the committee added Section 38 on page 21, version O of SB 64. He asked Ms. Beecher to explain the division's thoughts regarding this new section.

[3:42:31 PM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions on SB 64 and responded that the division confirmed it can meet the section's requirements either with existing systems or with a vendor. The only challenge is tracking the exact delivery date of ballots to voters, since that relies on USPS tracking. She added that residency requirements for voting mandate a person to be a resident of the state in which they vote, regardless of whether it is a state or federal race. Section 6 and 10 of SB 64 address residency requirements for voting. She noted that although the language in Section 10(I) may seem confusing, nonresidents of a state are not permitted to vote under any circumstances.

[3:45:31 PM](#)

SONJA KAWASAKI, Assistant Senate Majority Legal Counsel Alaska State Legislature Juneau, Alaska answered questions on SB 64 and stated that the two sections in question were drafted to clarify residency rules for voting. These sections allow someone who has a reasonable plan to return to the state or their former voting district to continue voting there, as mentioned in SB 64, Section 1(2). She said this reflects how the Division of Elections already handles ballots when voters move from their original registration address. While the sections may need further legal review, they are seen as technical clarifications rather than substantive changes.

[3:47:28 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI opined that the fundamental issue is sometimes people leave their residence, move overseas, but under

federal law still retain the right to vote. Sections 6 and 10 of SB 64 address this situation.

[3:48:00 PM](#)

MS. KAWASAKI explained that under current law, Alaskans who move, whether overseas, to another state, or within Alaska, can still vote in the district they intend to return to. Sections 6 and 10 aim to align with how the Division of Elections already applies the law, but with a shift from a vague "subjective intent" to a clearer requirement that the voter have an articulable and reasonable plan to return.

[3:49:21 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI noted that Alaska has more registered voters than actual citizens, partly because people register to vote in Alaska and then leave the state. Some do this to claim Alaska as their legal residence for tax reasons or to receive permanent fund dividends, which is fraudulent. He said that if the bill, as written, aligns with federal law, then the committee shouldn't delay its progress.

[3:51:03 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI referenced SB 64, page 2, lines 17-19, and sought confirmation that a person does not lose their Alaska residency by temporarily leaving the state with the intent to return. He gave an example of a child leaving for college from the parent's home.

[3:51:43 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI replied that is exactly the intent. He explained that the law aims to allow people who temporarily leave Alaska, such as students, seasonal residents, or military members, to maintain residency and vote, if they have a clear and reasonable plan to return. This prevents the voter rolls from being inflated by individuals with no real connection or intent to return to Alaska.

[3:52:34 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI referenced Section 6 that addresses the loss of Alaska residency by establishing residency or voting in another state and to reestablish one's voting right must requalify under AS 15.05. He asked Ms. Beecher if the Division can comply with Section 6.

[3:53:32 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded that someone who was a resident of Alaska, such as a person currently overseas, can still be considered an

Alaska resident for voting purposes. However, everyone must have a state of residency; you cannot be without jurisdiction. She said residency, in this context, determines where a person is eligible to vote.

[3:54:30 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI referenced page 2, lines 9-13, that allows voters to maintain residency based on their "intention to return," but the Division of Elections cannot determine someone's intentions. The proposed change requires voters to have a clear, reasonable, and articulable plan to return, rather than a vague intention, making the standard more concrete and enforceable.

[3:56:26 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[3:56:30 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to report CSSB 64, work order 34-LS0153\0, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:56:48 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and CSSB 64 (STA) was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

[3:57:02 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 77-PERM FUND; EMPLOYMENT; ELIGIBILITY

[3:58:30 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 77 "An Act relating to national criminal history record checks for certain employees of the Department of Revenue; relating to allowable absences for eligibility for a permanent fund dividend; relating to the confidentiality of certain information provided on a permanent fund dividend application; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; and providing for an effective date."

[3:58:53 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE KIEHL, District B, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 77. He stated that eligibility for the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) requires being a state resident with the intent to remain. SB 77 updates rules around allowable absences for PFD purposes. Currently, residents may be

gone up to 180 days in a qualifying year, with 16 specific categories of allowable absences. SB 77 outlines several key changes:

-Merchant Marine Training: Previously, absences for merchant mariners in training outside the state weren't fully counted, even though deployed merchant mariners may be gone longer. The bill now allows additional days for training programs located outside Alaska, helping those who work in Alaska's maritime industries.

-College Students: Full-time students attending school out of state already receive extra allowable days, but breaks (like Thanksgiving or spring break) didn't count, creating difficulties and extra paperwork. SB 77 treats these breaks as allowable absences, making the system fairer for students, especially those from lower- or middle-income families. He stated that this provision doesn't include summer months.

[4:02:16 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL continued with his introduction:

-Medical Absences: The current rules for being out of state for medical care not available in Alaska are overly complex. SB 77 simplifies this, ensuring that unexpected medical emergencies outside the state don't retroactively disqualify someone from receiving their PFD.

-Division Employee Security: SB 77 allows the PFD division to fingerprint its employees and job applicants (not PFD applicants) to ensure they don't have a history of fraud or embezzlement, protecting Alaskans' personal and financial information.

-Privacy of Applicant Lists: SB 77 keeps the list of PFD applicants' names private. This protects personal data from being harvested internationally and used to submit fraudulent applications.

-Electronic Notices for Garnishments: Alaskans who opt in for electronic notifications about their PFD will also receive electronic notices if their PFD is subject to garnishment, giving them the same choice as other notifications.

SENATOR KIEHL stated that SB 77 simplifies rules for state absences, strengthens security for the PFD division, protects applicant privacy, and expands electronic notification options,

building on prior proposals and aiming to streamline administration while enhancing protections.

[4:06:37 PM](#)

CATHY SCHLINGHEYDE, Staff, Senator Jesse Kiehl, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 77:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Sectional Analysis

Sec. 1: Requires the Permanent Fund Dividend division to fingerprint its staff and applicants for a background check.

Sec. 2: Amends allowable absences for PFD eligibility
Adds allowable absence for school breaks during the academic year
Adds allowable absence for merchant mariner training
Keeps medical absences from limiting the length of voluntary absences

Sec. 3: Conforms to Sec. 1 requiring the PFD division to fingerprint its staff and applicants for a background check.

Sec. 4: Makes the names of PFD applicants confidential

Sec. 5: Lets people opt-in for electronic levy notices

Sec. 6: Sets an effective date

[4:07:32 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked whether finger printing is a common standard in other divisions or if it's being proposed as a new standard for employment in the PFD division.

[4:07:58 PM](#)

MS. SCHLINGHEYDE responded that she isn't familiar with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) but she is aware of many state government divisions handling sensitive information, including several within the Department of Revenue (DNR), which already requires fingerprinting for employees.

[4:08:18 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL explained that fingerprinting must be authorized in statute to access the federal system for background checks.

This requirement is specific to certain job groups and does not automatically apply to all state employment; the legislature reviews it on a case-by-case basis.

[4:08:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI [announced invited testimony] and public testimony for SB 77.

[4:09:11 PM](#)

BEVERLY WOOLEY, representing self, Big Lake, Alaska, testified in support of SB 77. She said she is a cancer survivor. She described the challenges of accessing out-of-state medical care under the current eligibility rules for the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) eligibility. She said her and her spouse needed treatment unavailable in Alaska, which required spending time out of state. Fortunately, early diagnoses allowed them to stay within the allowable 180 days and receive their PFD, which was critical for covering medical and travel costs. She highlighted the problem if a serious medical diagnosis occurs late in the year after already using the allowable 180 days. Current rules could force Alaskans to limit necessary treatment to meet the 180-day cap, delay care until the following year, or lose the PFD. She said none of these options are practical or fair, especially given the stress, travel logistics, and additional costs involved in medical emergencies. She emphasized that retirees and other Alaskans may also use allowable days early in the year for travel or family visits, further complicated access to care. She said that SB 77 would alleviate this stress by simplifying rules and ensuring medical emergencies requiring out-of-state treatment don't unfairly jeopardize a PFD.

[4:13:58 PM](#)

KATI CAPOZZI, President, Alaska Chamber of Commerce, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 77 and the clarifying PFD statute, so Alaskans in the uniformed services or merchant marine training remain eligible to receive the PFD, if they meet all other requirements. Since 1997, over 700 Alaskans, including youth, Alaska Natives, displaced workers, and veterans, have trained at the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training, gaining Coast Guard certified skills. She said maritime companies rely on these programs to meet their commitment to hire locally. Denying PFDs during training could discourage younger Alaskans from pursuing these careers, which are designed to bring workers back to Alaska to live, work, and contribute to the economy.

[4:16:48 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 77 in committee.

[4:16:55 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 116-CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

[4:17:37 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 116 "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."

[4:18:10 PM](#)

JOE HAYES, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced SB 116 on behalf of the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee, Senator Kawasaki, Chair:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Sponsor Statement

"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."

Alaska has historically touted some of the strongest, most effective campaign finance laws in the nation which served to promote better accountability and trust in our elections and elected officials. In recent years, Alaskans have shown their support for fair and reasonable contribution limits, including a 2006 ballot initiative that passed overwhelmingly with 73 percent support. But, in 2021, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down Alaska's statutory campaign contribution limits, opening our state and local elections to the threat of unlimited political contributions directly to candidates from anyone, anywhere in the country.

[4:19:22 PM](#)

MR. HAYES continued with the sponsor statement:

In 2024, Alaska 23RCF2 [ballot initiative] was certified after a grassroots effort that gathered signatures from nearly 30,000 registered Alaskan voters and met the 7 percent threshold in 32 out of Alaska's 40 house districts. SB 116 mirrors 23RCF2 [ballot initiative].

SB 116 reinstates fair, reasonable, and constitutional campaign contribution limits adjusted based on Alaska's consumer price index rates moving forward, ensuring these limits remain constitutional.

To accomplish this, SB 116 does the following:

- Moves Alaska's campaign contributions to a "per election cycle" basis.
- Increases the statutory individual-to-candidate limit from \$500 per year to \$2,000 per election cycle and the group-to-candidate limit from \$1,000 per year to \$4,000 per election cycle.
- Directs the Alaska Public Offices Commission to adjust contribution limits for inflation.

These changes address the concerns laid out by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and United States Supreme Court precedent while upholding the expressed desire of Alaskan voters for fair and reasonable contribution limits and transparency in our elections.

[4:21:16 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked if the committee has in-house legal opinions on SB 116 and stated the Ninth Circuit and the Supreme Court have both ruled on different portions of campaign contribution limits in the past.

[4:21:28 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI answered yes and that he would invite legislative legal staff to discuss the limits with the committee at the next hearing of the bill. He referenced a past memo that seemed to indicate adjusting for inflation would meet legal standards but said he would share an official memo on SB 116 with the committee once he receives it.

[4:22:17 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI [announced invited testimony] and opened public testimony on SB 116.

[4:22:50 PM](#)

PAT RACE, representing self, Citizens Against Money in Politics (CAMP), Juneau, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 116 and stated that Alaska's campaign donation limits have bounced between \$500 and \$1,000 over the years. He said there was a lawsuit in 2015 where the courts ultimately said the \$500 cap was too low. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that limits are legal to prevent corruption, but if set too low, they unfairly protect incumbents and make it harder for challengers to compete. He said the goal now is to find a fair middle ground—high enough to allow real competition but low enough to prevent million-dollar donations from overwhelming local elections.

[4:26:26 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked whether this cap is money someone could give to an independent expenditure or a Political Action Committee (PAC).

[4:26:38 PM](#)

MR. RACE replied that, because of the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision, independent political expenditures may be unlimited if they are not coordinated with a campaign. This ruling has led to anonymous spending through outside groups. He said states can still regulate direct individual donations to candidates. Raising limits in a balanced way would at least ensure that large contributions go through super PACs—which cannot legally coordinate with campaigns—rather than directly influencing candidates.

[4:27:47 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT expressed concern that even if candidates don't receive large direct donations, outside groups and PACs will still spend heavily supporting their preferred candidates. Unlike candidates, who usually promote their vision positively, these groups often run negative or misleading campaigns. He said without limits on independent expenditures, he fears elections will only become nastier and more dominated by outside money.

[4:29:03 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that it is his belief that unlimited campaign contributions are damaging to Alaska's political system and said that *Citizens United* was one of the worst decisions of

his lifetime. He asked how similar this was to the ballot initiative.

[4:29:27 PM](#)

MR. RACE replied that if the legislature doesn't pass similar legislation, the unlimited campaign limits will appear in the 2026 ballot. He said advocates would rather avoid running another campaign since Alaskans have already shown strong support. Passing the legislation now would ensure reasonable campaign limits are in place before the 2026 election.

[4:30:15 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if this legislation is the same as the ballot initiative.

[4:30:28 PM](#)

MR. RACE responded it is his belief that this legislation is the same. He said the proposal raises individual contribution limits from \$500 to \$2,000 and group contributions from \$1,000 to \$4,000, with adjustments for inflation.

[4:30:57 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked why it's necessary to have limits on individual campaign donations, whether from the donor's perspective or the candidate receiving them.

[4:31:19 PM](#)

MR. RACE replied that large campaign donations can create the appearance of impropriety, especially in a state with past corruption scandals like VECO in 2006. He said reasonable limits on individual contributions help maintain public trust. In 2022, staff of Alaska's Public Offices Commission (APOC) recommended new limits, though they weren't formally adopted, and urged the legislature to revisit campaign finance laws.

[4:33:41 PM](#)

SHARMAN HALEY, Activist, Alaska Move to Amend, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 116. She paraphrased her written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Today we are talking about SB 116. This bill should not be controversial. It is unassailable legally and has solid support among your constituents across the political spectrum. The bill contains the same language as the Citizen's Initiative that will appear

on the 2026 ballot. But we hope that the Legislature will pass it this session and save us all the trouble.

[4:35:14 PM](#)

MS. HALEY continued with her testimony:

This legislation is legally unassailable because it was carefully crafted to conform to the five criteria dictated by the 9th Circuit Court that struck down our old law. Any grey area that might be grounds for legal challenge has been eliminated.

It is politically solid because time and again, Alaskans have expressed their support for strong campaign finance laws. Alaska's old campaign finance law, which began as a citizen's initiative, was enacted by the legislature in 1996. It was one of the strictest in the country, with contributions limits of \$500. The legislature revisited the issue in 2003, raising the limit to \$1000. But voters stepped up again in 2006 with another initiative reducing the limit back to \$500. It passed with 73 percent approval. This week I went down to the state archives and found that it passed by a wide margin in every single district of the state. We are saying we want the law to be strict: it protects our balance of power as voters and constituents. It limits the disproportionate influence and corrupting power of big money in our elections.

In 2020, polling showed that 71 percent of Alaskans would support a US constitutional amendment restoring our full authority to set reasonable limits on political spending in elections, including independent expenditures. The support is strong across both political parties and independents.

SB116 will set the limit for an individual contribution to an individual candidate at \$2000. While I myself might have set the limit at \$1000, I accept the political judgement of the sponsors that \$2000 is more politically viable. The two big improvements in this bill over the old law are that it automatically adjusts the limits for inflation once every ten years, and the limit is per election cycle, not just per year. I and my fellow Alaskans--your

constituents--support this bill and call on you to support it too.

[4:38:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked what she will say to the people if Alaska limits individual donations but outside groups can still spend unlimited money against candidates.

[4:39:23 PM](#)

MS. HALEY replied that independent expenditures are a major structural problem but noted progress toward a constitutional amendment that could restore Alaska's authority to regulate them. She said while contributions to these groups are unlimited, the groups must be reported, allowing analysis of who the major donors are and whether the donors are in- or out-of-state.

[4:41:02 PM](#)

CAROLINE STORM, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 116 and stated that this bill would reduce the time candidates spend fundraising, likely lower overall campaign spending, and keep more money circulating in Alaska.

[4:42:45 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 116 in committee.

[4:44:12 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:44 p.m.