

HB

482

SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

BILL NUMBER HB482

SPONSOR Koponen

BILL TITLE Extends date, AK. St. Fire Comm.

DATE REFERRED 3.22.90

HEARING SCHEDULED

FISCAL NOTE PREPARED

SPONSOR CONTACTED

INTERESTED PARTIES CONTACTED

OTHER

House extends state panel that never was

EMPIRE 3.22.90

By LARRY PERSILY

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Alaska State Fire Commission has no members, no budget and has never held a meeting. But that didn't stop the House from voting Wednesday to extend the commission's life through 1994.

Supporters said the commission is needed and deserves a chance to work. It is charged with establishing a state master plan for fire prevention and coordinating fire-related programs.

The commission is required by law to hold quarterly meetings, but has never met since it was created four years ago. House Bill 482 would reduce its costs by requiring only a single meeting each year, said Rep. Niilo Koponen, D-Fairbanks and the bill's prime sponsor.

Perhaps a lower price tag

would help the commission get started, Koponen said.

The House approved \$58,500 for commission travel, a full-time staff assistant and other expenses. The bill passed 38-2 and will move to the Senate.

The commission's predecessor was the state Task Force on Fire Prevention and Control, which was established by the Legislature in 1980. The task force was terminated in 1983, but reappeared in 1984 for 120 days, Koponen said.

The 1984 task force recommended creation of a permanent commission, which the Legislature approved in 1986. Lawmakers provided the new commission with \$180,000.

But Gov. Bill Sheffield blocked the money during the state's 1986

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Panel...

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budget crisis. He did not appoint any members to the commission and it never met, Koponen said.

The 1987-88 Legislature tried but failed to find any money for the commission, which continued to exist only on paper. It will cease to exist as of June 30 unless the Senate agrees with the House action to extend the commission.

Reps. Lyman Hoffman, D-Bethel, and Eileen MacLean, D-Barrow, voted against the bill extend-

ing the commission.

"We have too many boards and commissions," Hoffman said.

While Hoffman said he has nothing against the commission, he suggested that dropping it would constitute a good start at cutting the state budget.

Supporters said the commission is needed to coordinate all elements of fire service in the state, including code compliance, firefighter training, education and insurance.

4.790 T.E.

The latest joke from Juneau

MOST NEWS out of Juneau is depressing. But not all of it.

We got great amusement the other day from the report that the House has voted to extend for another year the life of the Alaska State Fire Commission.

We had forgotten there was such a thing, if we ever knew in the first place. But that's all right. The commission has no members. The law says it must meet four times a year — but there has never been a commission meeting. And the law authorizing this needless and useless thing has been on the books for four years.

Nobody has missed it at all.

But undaunted by all that, the House voted to renew the commission for another four years — but only on a semi-annual basis this time around.

Not only that, the House bill authorizes \$58,500 to fi-

nance travel by commission members and to pay for a full-time staff assistant.

The comedy of it all is that this thing sailed through the House on a 38-2 vote.

Why? Well, supporters said the commission really is needed — and that it can do a job promoting fire safety, or something like that.

THE WHOLE thing is a joke. It would be just another way to spend money and to get some political friends appointed to a commission.

Bless Democratic Reps. Lyman Hoffman of Bethel and Eileen MacLean of Barrow, the only House members with the common sense to vote against this. "We have too many boards and commissions," Mr. Hoffman said.

If we're lucky, the Senate will agree, and this nonsensical bit of business can be confined to the trash can where it belongs.

ALASKA STATE FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 34324
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HB #82
HJR 65

March 25, 1990

Editor
Juneau Empire
3100 Channel Drive
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Editor,

Your March 23 editorial jeered the Alaska House of Representatives for extending the Alaska Fire Commission. We believe that in this instance the legislators deserved cheers not jeers for their action.

The Alaska Fire Commission has existed in name only from its inception because funding was deleted from the budget. Without funding the Commission went unappointed. The problems that the Fire Commission was created to deal with have not gone away.

The Task Force on Fire Prevention and Control reported "The Commission is needed because no single agency of state government represents all elements of the fire service which includes code compliance, plans review, fire training, public fire education, insurance, wildlands fires, aviation and marine firefighting, local fire departments, industrial fire brigades and more.... Those elements of the Fire Service represented by state level programs are administered through decisions made in the context of individual programs and departmental goals rather than with regard to the entire fire service, resulting in little coordination among state fire-related programs, and even less coordination between state programs and federal agencies, local governments and private industry.

Alaska holds the dubious distinction of having the highest fire death rate in the United States. The U.S. has the highest fire death among industrialized nations. The Fire Commission is intended to address this problem.

New Federal standards applying to training and equipment for firefighting, hazardous materials handling and disaster response are upon us, but no coordinated effort is being made to meet these federally mandated standards. If the Exxon Valdez did nothing else, it should have taught us the importance of coordination between agencies. The Fire Commission would correct this situation.

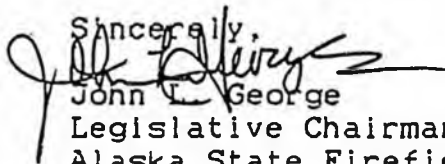
Without a centralized agency to deal with fire issues, fire departments throughout the state are on their own to determine their equipment and training needs and to meet their perceived needs in any way they can. In the past, this

has resulted in totally inappropriate equipment purchases. In some cases the State purchased fire trucks for the bush without regard for training, warm storage or adequate roads for equipment to respond to fires. As a result, more than one fire truck rests useless and abandoned where it was offloaded from the barge. No State agency has ever been responsible for reviewing fire departments needs. Many rural departments do not have the necessary expertise to determine their own needs and they have nowhere to turn for advice. The Fire Commission would review needs and make recommendations for appropriate equipment and training based on the needs and conditions of the area.

Your editorial incorrectly stated that \$58,500 was appropriated for commission travel. This amount is the total funding for staff, equipment, supplies, communications, printing and travel for the commission. The Task Force felt that the Fire Commission was "the best mechanism for assuring a greater return from existing dollars spent by state-level fire protection programs, and as a means to assure change in the future resulting in decreased fire losses for Alaska."

Cheers to the legislators who voted to extend the Alaska Fire Commission and to fund it's operation. They have the foresight and determination to deal with a problem that has been largely ignored in the past. Cheers not jeers for efficiency in the fire service.

Sincerely,



John T. George

Legislative Chairman

Alaska State Firefighters Association

Alaska State Legislature
Representative Niilo Koponen

Item 3
cc

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S P O N S O R S T A T E M E N T

H B 4 8 2

HB 482 would extend the Alaska State Fire Commission until 1994, rather than allowing it to sunset this year. It does, however, amend AS 44.44.120 to decrease the cost and increase coordination with fire services in Alaska.

Chapter 157, SLA 1980 established a Task Force on Fire Prevention and Control to: 1) identify fire loss problems in Alaska; 2) identify agencies involved in fire protection activities; 3) recommend modifications to improve the state's fire protection system; and 4) provide documentation to assist agencies in meeting their responsibilities. The Task Force was to submit their final report to the governor and legislature by January 1, 1983. This Task Force was not funded for their third year and terminated June 30, 1983.

A second Task Force was established in 1984 with the same objectives and given 120 days to finish their work. The second Task Force issued a report in December, 1984 detailing eight major areas of concern: 1) fire education and public awareness; 2) fire service training; 3) capital projects; 4) arson; 5) code enforcement; 6) emergency medical services; 7) wildlands fire protection; and 8) interagency planning, coordination and consolidation. Within the last category the Task Force recommended creating a State Fire Commission as a broad based policy setting group to provide direction and coordination of all the fire-related programs.

In 1986 the Alaska State Fire Commission was established (AS 44.41.100-.130) to: 1) develop a state master plan for fire prevention and provide coordination for fire-related programs; 2) establish policy guidelines for agencies with fire protection programs; 3) adopt regulations as necessary; 4) make recommendations for fire-related programs; and 5) report to the governor and legislature when requested. There was a fiscal note of \$180,000.00 funded with the bill establishing the Commission. Due to the revenue shortfall during FY 87, Governor Sheffield recommended that the funding for the Commission be eliminated, and the Commission did not begin its activities.

The Fifteenth Legislature attempted to fund the legislation through a separate account into which a tax on fire insurance premiums would be deposited. Although this device is used in most other states, it was not acceptable to the Alaska Legislature, and the responsibility for providing direction and coordination of fire-related programs was not addressed.

HB 482 cuts the number of required meetings to one a year (although others may be called in emergency). That meeting is to be coordinated with the annual meeting of the Alaska Fire Chiefs Association. Typically, the Alaska Fire Fighters Association, Fire Insurers, the Insurance Services Organization, municipal officials responsible for fire services and building codes, and etc. all meet at the same time and place or attend one or another of the above mentioned meetings. All members of the proposed Fire Commission should therefore be at the joint conference. Testimony on policy guidelines for fire protection programs, proposed regulations, the state fire protection master plan and all matters falling within the purview of the Commission can be taken up at that time. The Commission can have a short meeting at the close of the conference to make needed policy decisions.

From those proceedings, the single staff member of the commission can, under the direction of the State Fire Marshall, prepare the needed reports to the governor and the legislature. That same staff assistant, will, during the year, maintain contact with the fire and rescue services statewide. Interim meetings of the board for the purpose of discussing regulations, budget and other matters, can be held by teleconference and/or computer network, alleviating the expense and time of travel.

NK.dm

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: _____
Title: Extend Alaska State Fire
Commission
Sponsor: Koponen
Requestor: Koponen

Agency Affected: Public Safety
BRU: Commissioner's Office
Components: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96
PERSONAL SERVICES	37.0	37.0	37.0	37.0	0	0
TRAVEL	12.0	12.0	12.0	12.0	0	0
CONTRACTUAL	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.4	0	0
SUPPLIES	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	0	0
EQUIPMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAND & STRUCTURES	0	0	0	0	0	0
GRANTS, CLAIMS	0	0	0	0	0	0
MISCELLANEOUS	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL OPERATING	58.5	58.5	58.5	58.5	0	0
CAPITAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
REVENUE	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	58.5	58.5	58.5	58.5	-0-	-0-
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	58.5	58.5	58.5	58.5	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	1	1	1	1	0	0
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Personnel - Admin Asst 1; Travel & Per diem for 1 meeting, 1 conference, 1 hearing for staff, 9 members and 5 ex officios; Contractual- communications (4.0), printing & advertising (4.0), subscriptions (.4); supplies (1.1).

Prepared by: House State Affairs Phone: 465-4963
Division: _____ Date: Feb 27, 1990

Approved by Commissioner: *W. A. Bruch* Brucher, Chair Date: Feb 27, 1990
Agency: _____

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