



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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Senate Democrats Take Stand for Teachers

Governor pushes special interest law for top bureaucrat, claims ignorance

JUNEAU – Senate President Gene Therriault (R-North Pole) and Governor Frank Murkowski claimed ignorance this week about Democratic Senators' high ground objections to passage of House Bill 140. The governor's bill changes the state benefit rules for cabinet level appointments but leaves good teachers and schools in the dust.

Republican claims this bill is necessary to hire a commissioner are misleading, said Democrats. The governor wants HB140 for a specific person.

"The Governor wants a special exemption for the head shed but not for the classroom," said Senate Democratic Whip Kim Elton (D-Juneau). "The Senate leadership has spent an incredible amount of time and energy on this bill because of a fixation on doing something for a chief bureaucrat."

Alaska has a chronic problem with teacher recruitment and retention, Democrats argued, and HB 140 fails to address the issue. Vocal and public arguments against this special interest legislation fell on deaf Republican ears.

"The last commissioner of education came to work and was penalized \$20,000 for her dedication to education," said Senator Gretchen Guess (D-Anchorage). "I have argued that teachers should receive the same incentive to return to service that the Governor wants to give his appointee."

"I've been threatened with reductions to Learning Centers within my district without my support of this bill," said Senator Georgianna Lincoln (D-Rampart). "Those tactics will not work with me."

"Once you give in to a bully you will always give in to a bully," said Guess.

Senate Democrats want the most qualified Education Commissioner but this vote is not about who is most qualified.

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Sen. Bettye Davis, Sen. Johnny Ellis, Sen. Kim Elton, Sen. Lyman Hoffman, Sen. Hollis French, Sen. Gretchen Guess, Sen. Georgianna Lincoln, Sen. Donny Olson, Rep. Ethan Berkowitz, Rep. Sharon Cissna, Rep. Harry Crawford, Rep. Eric Croft, Rep. Les Gara, Rep. Max Gruenberg, Rep. David Guttenberg, Rep. Reggie Joule, Rep. Mary Kapsner, Rep. Beth Kerttula, Rep. Albert Kookesh, Rep. Carl Moses