



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

News From The House Majority

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House Education Committee Hears Presentation by Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force

(JUNEAU) –The House Special Committee on Education, chaired by Representative Mark Neuman (R-Mat-Su), had a presentation by the Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force at noon on Thursday, March 2. Alaska’s First Lady Nancy Murkowski, Chair of the Task Force, and its members were greeted by a packed house. There was tremendous interest and the presentations were warmly received.

Robert Grunewald of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis discussed the financial importance of a good education. He reports that, “Early childhood education is an economic development with a high public return.” In the Perry Preschool study, the estimated return on investment was \$17 to \$1 – with a public rate of return of 16%. Bridgett Chandler, of the Washington State Governor’s Early Learning Council discussed brain development, saying that, “Brains are plastic throughout life, and we can learn and heal until death, but never as well as in our early years.” She went on to explain the importance of nurturing relationships and how social and emotional well-being affects cognitive gains. Representative Neuman asked Ms. Chandler if she had any suggestions for parents. She stated, “It can be as simple and as complex as letting your child know that you love them.” There are lifelong benefits from a healthy beginning – which increases a child’s chances of higher individual incomes, greater success of learning, and less chance of criminality.

Other panel members included: Ira Perman, President of the Alaska Humanities Forum; David Wight, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, President & CEO, Retired; Edna Ahgeak MacLean, Ph.D., President Emeritus, Ilisagvik College; John Davis, Chair, Alaska Association of School Administrators; Candace Winkler, CEO, Child Care Connection; Sharon Gagnon, Ph.D., Board of Directors, Alaska Humanities Forum; Cathy Rasmuson, Trustee, Rasmuson Foundation. These members, from various areas of the state ranging from the private sector, rural and native communities, educational, and the philanthropic sector, each gave short presentations.

Mrs. Murkowski is an advocate for Alaska’s children. We discovered that too many Alaska children were entering kindergarten unable to read and more importantly, unable to learn. She stated, “The task force is committed to changing the picture so that every child will be ready to read, ready to learn.” While Mrs. Murkowski is enjoying being near her six adult children and 13 grandchildren, she remains active on the task force. The next meeting will be April 13th at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage.

A reception for legislators and task force members was held at 4:30 at the Governor’s Mansion.

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