

Alaska Education Update

Tuesday, December 9, 2014

Walker-Mallott Press Conference

Governor Bill Walker and Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott held a press conference at the Governor's Mansion just before the holiday open house on Tuesday, December 9. Gov. Walker addressed several education-related questions.

When asked about still having two acting commissioners left over from Governor Sean Parnell's term [Mike Hanley of the Dept. of Education & Early Development and Larry Hartig of the Dept. of Environmental Conservation], Gov. Walker said he's interviewed Hanley and knows Hartig, and is seriously considering keeping them both on. He hopes to have all appointments in place in the next few weeks. They've invited people to apply and have been spending a lot of time reading resumes. He wants to make sure people across the state, from Egegik to Anchorage, have the same opportunity to apply and be part of the administration.



Gov. Walker said his highest priority as governor is the fiscal situation. He's met with the co-chairs of the House Finance Committee and one of the chairs of the Senate Finance Committee, and has spoken to legislative leadership.



Gov. Walker was asked whether cutting DEED's budget would put the state in jeopardy of being sued again, since the courts recently reaffirmed the state's responsibility to oversee education through the Moore decision, and Commissioner Hanley has said in the past that if any more funding is cut from the department they will be cutting programs. Gov. Walker said he's concerned about being able to provide services; the best quality of education is their highest priority. He said, "We have to be mindful of potential litigation of course, but our focus is quality education. We need to figure out how to deliver that given the budget constraints we're under."

Regarding the budget process he will be using, Gov. Walker said it's a momentous task. They would like to get their new commissioners in place and work with them so they can be part

of the process. Probably the biggest changes to the budget will come at the February deadline [the governor's budget amendments are due by the 30th day of session, which is February 18th this session]. He doesn't think he will make any changes to the budget before then. It will be a bigger process than just making incremental changes.

Regarding unallocated cuts to departments, Gov. Walker said they will take input from departments on that. They will ask departments where cuts should be made, and if not enough cuts are suggested by departments, they will make further cuts if it's appropriate. He thinks they will have to go deeper than the cuts Gov. Parnell was going to make.

Gov. Walker said he has no specific education policies he'd like to propose at this time, but he thinks they will have some. A lot of people are concerned about budget cuts. He thinks the policy now is to have the best education possible, and they are very protective of that.



This seal can be seen behind Walker & Mallott in the photo above