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Gatto Presents Resolution to Secretary of Education Asks for Consideration of Rural Challenges in “No Child Left Behind”

(JUNEAU) – The House Special Committee on Education Chair Representative Carl Gatto (R-Palmer) met with U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige in Anchorage on Sunday. Gatto presented Paige with [House Joint Resolution 13](#), signed by Governor Frank Murkowski. HJR 13 asks for the U.S. Department of Education to consider Alaska’s unique challenges in remote rural schools as the state complies with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

“Alaska’s children deserve an education of the same quality as what children in the rest of the country receive,” Gatto said. “However, we seek and need flexibility in how we meet the goals set by NCLB.”

Among the present challenges in Alaska’s remote rural schools, Gatto wants Secretary Paige to understand the difficulties when an entire school has only one teacher. Gatto says he also hopes that this visit will show Paige how Alaska’s definition of rural is more extreme than in the rest of the country.

“In the Lower 48, ‘rural’ usually means a small town at the end of a dirt road,” Gatto said. “In Alaska, ‘rural’ can mean a school that can be reached only by boat in the summer and snowmachine in the winter. Transporting students to school by airplane is not unheard of.”

Gatto said that Paige’s visit emphasizes Alaska’s need for consideration under NCLB. While that consideration should not allow Alaska’s standards to fall below what other states face, Gatto said it should allow Alaska to pursue different methods of achieving those goals without fear of penalties.

“Adjusting to these requirements is a learning process just like anything else,” Gatto said. “We can still expand a teacher’s education; however, we need to educate them while they’re in their communities instead of taking them out of their environment and away from their jobs. We should be able to allow qualified teachers elsewhere to electronically monitor the teachers in training. Technology can help us overcome the challenge of distance and achieve a better education system for our students.”

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