



## ***2019 NCSBN Leadership and Public Policy Conference - Nursing Leadership*** **Session Video Transcript**

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### **Event**

2019 NCSBN Leadership and Public Policy Conference

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### **Presenter**

Cathy Giessel, MS, RN, ANP, FAANP, Senate President, Alaska State Legislature

I am suppressing the urge to say good morning because in Alaska right now, it's 11 o'clock in the morning. It's hard to adjust the fact that it's afternoon here.

So yes, I am the Senate President in Alaska. And I also maintain my nurse practitioner license. I was asked to speak to you today about the path that I took to leadership and policy in the legislature. Now, you may be asking yourself, "Why should we care?" Good question.

I'm hoping that some of the things that I touch on related to my path to leadership will be helpful to you as you consider the opportunities that you might have before you. So I want to make this talk, while it describes my path, it's not about me. It's about you thinking about how these opportunities may present themselves for you.

Now, I'm very aware because I travel a great deal, last week I was in Tampa at a political meeting, that politics here in the lower 48 is very different than politics in Alaska, but the principles remain the same. When we think about leadership, I'm often asked, "Well, what do you think the most important quality is of a leader?"

And of course, most people would answer, "Integrity." And I would agree with that. I agree. Integrity is a critical landmark piece for a leader. But courage is also a critical piece. And I think as I describe to you, my course that you'll understand where courage comes into it.

There also has to be a real passion for doing this kind of work. And the reason is it's not easy. If any of you are thinking, "Well, Senate President, that must be quite a prestigious position." It's actually a ton of work, W-O-R-K. There's not a lot of glory to it.

So that's where you need to have the passion that keeps you continuing. So nurses, what makes us nurses? Well, for most of us, we became nurses because we care about people. We want to help people with their health problems. That's exactly what one does in the public policy realm also.

That is a motivation for me. That is my passion to make my state a better place for the people of Alaska to live. Healthy lives, productive businesses, healthy families, with children that are going to good schools, that addresses our homeless problem and the opioid issue.

Those are the passionate things that drive me. Sounds a lot like nursing, doesn't it? So, you and I share those same values and passions. So, along the way, despite those glorious passions that we might have and goals, there will be critics.

And that is something perhaps you've already experienced if you're in any kind of public policy realm. One thing that I keep reminding myself is, there are no statues that have been put up to critics. There have only been statues put up to people that have taken risks, risks to do something better for their community, their country, their family.

So, in the course of this, while I'm talking about leadership, you're also going to learn a lot about Alaska. So first of all, where is Alaska? Most school kids think that it's a little place down next to Mexico, because that's where the map people put it.

But in fact, there's Alaska. We believe in Alaska that this is how God looks on planet Earth. So let me orient you. This is the North Pole, of course, and here's Alaska. This dotted line going around here is the Arctic Circle. Okay.

There's a lot of countries that are above the Arctic Circle. The United States is an Arctic nation because of Alaska. But here we have Russia right next door. Yes, right next door. Then we come over here to the northern countries in Europe. There's Finland, Sweden, Norway. Iceland is slightly below the Arctic Circle.

Here's Greenland, a possession of Denmark. And, of course, here's our good neighbor, the Canadians. So I point this out because living in the Arctic brings with it some issues, some challenges, as well as some opportunities. One of the many challenges that we face in the Arctic, of course, is the climate, but is also things like depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, food insecurity.

These are common problems in the Arctic. We're exploring why. Partly, I believe these are issues common to the human condition. But there's also the situation of a very cold climate, very dark time period, half the year is quite dark, things like that.

But these are the kinds of challenges we face. But we also have some wonderful opportunities. And those opportunities come in the realm of oil and gas opportunities. Right up here above the Arctic Circle is an area you may have heard of called the Alaska North Slope. In 1967, the largest conventional oil field in North America was discovered on the North Slope of Alaska, and it's being developed today.



So, Nome is another, ironically, population center. I just said it was 4,000 people, right? But this gives you a sense of our state. Now down here in Southwest Alaska is a community called Bethel. Bethel is pretty large, it's 6,000 people.



And the speakers were kind of experts in what they were talking about. I learned what a gold star banner meant, a veteran...a young man that had been killed in war. That meant a lot to me as I went door to door when I later ran.

And I would see a gold star banner in a window in a home. I wouldn't have known that if I hadn't been a member of Toastmasters and had a veteran in my group do a speech on what those star banners are. So when people ask me, "What should I do if I want to run for office?"

I say, "Join the Toastmasters club. You will love it and you'll learn a lot of skills." So a couple years after I had joined Toastmasters, someone came up to me and said, "You know, I think the state senator in your district is probably going to be retiring pretty soon. You should think about running." So, of course, that was a frightening thought, but I went to my husband and said, "What do you think?"

Our children were all grown by then. Now, some people choose to run for office and serve in office, even when their children are small. I wasn't that brave. I waited till my kids were all grown. That would be a huge commitment. I see my colleagues doing that and they do it well. It certainly can be done.

But my children were all raised. It was just my husband and I. And he wasn't so sure, but he said, "Yes, I will support you in doing this." So I began this very frightening endeavor of running for office. Now, I had never run for anything. I'd never served in a school board. I'd never been a PTA president.

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All of that stuff costs money. And I was just a regular person, a nurse practitioner. I was working at the time. Yeah, my husband had a job, he is an engineer, but we were not wealthy. So, those were the two things that I had to work on that was really hard for me.

I don't know about you, but as a nurse, I'm used to helping people not asking people to help me, and especially not asking people for money. So that was a huge frightening challenge. The other thing that

I didn't know anything about really our resources and where our income came from. So I went to every senate resource meeting there was. Now, while I was in the minority, it is true the Senate President said to me, "You're a nurse. I should put you on the Health Committee."

This may surprise you and perhaps none of you would have made this choice, but I said, "No, I don't want to be on the Health Committee." The reason I did that is there was another nurse in the legislature. She was in the house. Her name was Peggy Wilson. And she had chaired the House Health Committee for 10 years. And I had spoken to Peggy and she said, "You know, I've done all I can on the Health Committee. What I really want to do is get on the Transportation Committee, but my caucus won't let me off."

And so I realized it's easy to get typecast. You're the nurse, you should be on the Health Committee. So I said, "No, actually, I want to be on the Resources Committee." Well, that's kind of a prime seat and I didn't get it. I was on Labor and Commerce and that's fine with me. Even as a minority member on Labor and Commerce, it put me dealing with issues for boards, boards and commissions.

That's my lane. I know how regulations are written. I know how boards operate. I know the best way to allow boards to function. And so it was a great fit actually and I enjoyed my two years on Labor and Commerce. But after those two years, the control in the Senate flipped, and suddenly I was in the majority.

And that's when I said I want a seat on the Senate Resources Committee. So why would I want a seat on Resources if I'm a nurse? Because I believe that committee represents the opportunity for Alaskans to have a good job, a family-supporting wage, meaningful work, and have a life that is productive in our state.

And that is why I wanted to be on Resources. They not only appointed me to the Resources Committee, but they appointed me the chair of the Resources Committee. I held that seat for six years. I'm the second longest-serving Chair of the Resources Committee in our state. The longest-serving was also a woman.

But in that role, I was able to make a difference in the job opportunities in our state. Now, why does that matter? It matters because of this.

So you and I as nurses have to have continuing education to maintain our licenses. And so I'm always reading medical stuff, you know, continuing education stuff comes on the internet and so forth. Well, one day, two years ago, I happened to notice an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association.





In fact, there's a portion of the Native Claims Settlement Act that requires that one corporation, The North Slope Corporation right there, of course, makes a huge amount of money because that's where Pluto Bay is, they must share at least 50% with the other 11 corporations. So depending on what their prosperity is, they share among each other. Now, 1981 Kaparuk is part of the North Slope, so that came online.

This is an interesting one. 1989, Red Dog mine opened. So Red Dog mine is on Native Corporation land. It's over here above Kotzebue. Remember Kotzebue has the population...was at 4,000 people, maybe was 3,000. Very small, but the Native Corporation owns that land.

And so the mining company has to go to the corporation and say, "Can we work on your land?" So they formed a partnership. That mining compan



Today, I told you when I was a child and went with my dad to work flying around to those small communities and what honey pots were and all the rest of that. Today, I can walk into schools and open my laptop and I'm co



salmon that my husband caught that day. These apparently sell for a very high price on the east coast. Maybe some of you have eaten some of them, but Alaskans have the opportunity to go and fish for ourselves.

The Copper River is named the Copper River because right next to that glacier, the Kennecott Glacier, is a historic mine, the Kennecott Copper Mine. It's poised on the side of a mountain. Most glaciers, of course, are in a valley. So here's the side of a mountain.

And when geologists were looking at that in the early 1900s, they actually thought it was a grassy field. It was so green. They got over there and found out the copper deposit was laying right on the surface. It was an incredibly rich deposit. So the mine was built there. They mined from 1911 to 1938. They took out \$200 million worth of copper.

In today's dollars, that's \$3.6 billion of copper. They built a train rail system to the mine and got the stuff to Tidewater. My point is this river still supports Copper River king, red, silver salmon in abundance.

They are high-quality fish. It is possible to develop natural resources and protect the natural environment. So that's the emphasis I always make to my colleagues as well as my fellow Alaskans and I make to you as well. Technology allows us to do these things and still preserve our environment.

So I encourage you to think about joining me in public policy, whether it's in the administration or in the legislative branch, or even as a staff person. My staff does aW\*n8ss mode7(w2(B)k-6h of -20(anc76)20767(TJETQ0.