

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



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Rules Committee  
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Senate Finance Committee  
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Health & Social Services Committee  
•  
Community & Regional Affairs  
Committee  
•  
World Trade Special Committee  
•  
Committee on Committees

## SENATOR JOHNNY ELLIS RULES COMMITTEE CHAIR

### **SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 24** **SPONSOR STATEMENT**

Senate Concurrent Resolution 24 begins the process of recognizing 100 years of government by the people, as embodied by the establishment and convening of an elected legislature in Alaska beginning on March 3, 1913.

Before looking at 100-years of accomplishments of Alaska's Legislature, please take a moment to consider how elected representation in Alaska was achieved in the first place. The journey was a long one.

Today many people take for granted that we have the right of representation, of appeal, of petition, etc. No such rights existed in legal practice during pre-territorial days. This was by and large a lawless land from Alaska's purchase in 1867 until 1884, when the Organic Act passed Congress, and even then Alaska was in the hands of executives; territorial governors were appointed by the President of the United States.

At least 25 measures for representation were presented to Congress, none ever reached a vote in either house before 1912. The rationale for denying Alaskans the rights of representation and appeal were firstly that its population was too small, and secondly that it would be too much of a financial drain on the federal treasury. However, every other territory in U.S. history had a similarly sized population at the time of its induction as a territory; and by 1916, then Governor John Strong estimated that Alaska had added approximately \$500,000,000 to the national wealth since its purchase in 1867, a figure that exceeded national trade with China and the Philippines.

Regardless, it was only after 46 years of exhaustive efforts appealing to the President and Congress that Alaska was finally afforded the right to establish and elect its own Legislature. The First Territorial Legislature was quick to pass ground-breaking laws such as women's suffrage, compulsory school ages, required registration of lobbyists, 8-hour work days, and the establishment of the Pioneer's Homes. Thereafter the Alaska Legislature continued to have a colorful history.

The small Commission established by SCR 24 would set out to examine that history carefully over the coming months and present to the Legislature in 2013 a schedule of events commensurate of 100 years of elected service to Alaska and its people. Thank you for your consideration of this timely legislation.