

HOME RULE FOR ALASKA.

WICKERSHAM
FILES
1912

For Immediate Release.

Washington, D. C.,

(Release) Alaska has no territorial legislature, and has not had at any time since its purchase by the United States in 1867. Congress is Alaska's only legislative body. With 65,000 people and an average trade with the United States for the last decade of \$55,000,000.00 a year the territory is greatly in need of the developing aid of a local legislature. Every other territory created by the United States, since the passage of the Ordinance of 1787 for the organization of the Ohio country, has been given a legislative body at the moment of its creation.

On April 24th, the House of Representatives passed a bill creating an elective legislature in Alaska such as the other territories have had and that bill is now pending before the United States Senate. It was referred to the Senate Committee on Territories of which Senator William Alden Smith, of Michigan, is chairman. It is now before that committee.

It is interesting to note that Missouri territory for twenty years was much larger in area than Alaska and had a much smaller population. Sixteen territories were created each having a smaller population in proportion to area than Alaska. Nine states were created at a time when each had a less population than Alaska now has.

Delaware became a state in 1776 and by the census of 1790 had a population of only 59,096, while Alaska had at the time of the last census a population of 54,356. As late as 1890 the new state of Wyoming had a population of but 60,705.

The most interesting feature of Alaska's claim of right to organize an elective territorial legislature of her own is her astonishing trade with the United States. Since the United States purchased Alaska in 1867 there has been extracted from that northern territory \$206,813,594.00 in gold, silver, and copper; the sea and fur products amount to \$229,710,036.00, and with the cash items paid into the United States Treasury by the people of the territory the total production of Alaska in forty-five years amounts to \$446,640,984.00. Against that enormous sum is to be placed the expenditures of the United States in the purchase and maintenance of the territory, which amounts to only the sum of \$35,816,674.00, and leaves a balance in favor of Alaska of more than \$410,000,000.00. This astonishing production of the northern territory is to be supplemented, so we are informed, by an area of agricultural lands in the great interior Tanana valley of equal arable capacity and of larger area than all the land actually put to crop in Norway, Sweden and Finland, where more than ten million people live from agriculture alone.

The statistics presented certainly make a good case in favor of granting Alaska an elective territorial legislature. Aside from the figures, however, there is a question of principle involved which is dear to the heart of every American. It is the principle of the right of the people to rule.

The bill as it passed the House carefully limits the powers of the Alaska legislature with more than the usual safeguards against unwise and vicious legislation. There is first the veto of the governor, appointed by the President of the United States, and therefore presumed to be a reasonably discreet person; then Congress reserves the right to disapprove any act passed by the Alaskan legislature, which gives an additional veto upon its acts. These two vetoes taken in connection with the presumption that the representatives of the people in the legislature will wish to do right ought sufficiently to protect the public from bad legislation in that territory. The Act also provides that the legislature shall have no authority to dispose of any part or portion of the public domain. Neither the coal lands, the fisheries, water power, nor any other national property can be disposed of without the affirmative approval of Congress.

The power conferred is very largely limited to the police power and the bill does little more than permit the people of the territory to elect an agency under Congress to assist in laying the foundations of civil government in the territory.

There is no good reason why the Committee on Territories should not report this bill, and the Senate pass it at this session.

There is no good reason why Alaska should not have home-rule.