

**HOUSE & SENATE JOINT
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**STATE OF THE STATE
ADDRESS
BY
THE HONORABLE WALTER J. HICKEL
GOVERNOR
STATE OF ALASKA

BEFORE A JOINT SESSION
OF THE
SECOND SESSION OF THE
EIGHTEENTH ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**

January 11, 1994

Juneau, Alaska

THE STATE OF THE STATE
by the Honorable Walter J. Hickel

before the 18th Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
January 11, 1994

ALASKA FIRST

Mr. President, Madam Speaker, members of the cabinet, fellow representatives of the people of Alaska, and Alaskans everywhere.

When we met here in this historic chamber three years ago, many for the first time, we spoke of a new beginning for Alaska.

Well, we meet tonight to continue that work.

And if anyone expects a proud list of the accomplishments of this administration---I say let's leave that to the history books.

And if anyone tells you that Alaska's best days are behind us, I say, they're looking in the wrong direction.

Let's roll up our sleeves. We have work to do.

Crime continues to spread fear in our cities. Families are failing. Health care and schools need reform. Seniors need better services. And rural Alaskans need jobs.

In addition, Outside special interests continue to threaten Alaska's sovereign rights and our way of life.

And oil prices are down---way down.

Twenty-seven years ago, I stood in this chamber for the first time as Governor to address the state of the state.

Jay Kerttula and Carl Moses were in the Chamber then, then as now, as were Ted Stevens, Tom Fink, Don Young, and Willie Hensley and Frank Murkowski - our youngest.

The challenge that night wasn't oil prices---we hadn't yet found the oil. (Pause)

And yet, people were talking about crime...

...there was a considerable stir in the newspapers when it was revealed that a bunch of driver's licenses had been issued in the names of Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Abraham Lincoln. (Pause)

Now---I know some of you think that I knew these great men personally. (Pause) Well, we probably could use Lincoln's help to free Alaska from federal slavery.

But that night 27 years ago I set forth a simple, two-word phrase that has always been my guiding principle---ALASKA FIRST.

I have worked hard every day of my adult life---as a builder and businessman, as Secretary and as Governor---as a neighbor, a husband, a father and grandfather...

...on behalf of a single, lifelong mission---to do my damnedest for that country called Alaska.

Thursday night, when I speak to you on the State of the Budget, I will describe my plan for how to work our way through this revenue shortfall.

I will outline our long-range options. And the course Alaska should take.

Unlike when oil prices dropped in 1986, we will not over-react.

We have reserves to provide a bridge for the short-term.

And for the mid-term and long-term, we have a multitude of options.

So tonight, let's not let the price of oil blind us.

Tonight, we've got work to do.

Because putting ALASKA FIRST means confronting the epidemic of violence.

Putting ALASKA FIRST means our schools must do better.

Putting ALASKA FIRST means caring for our seniors.

It means making health care accessible and affordable.

And putting ALASKA FIRST means standing up to the federal government. (Pause)

This is a full agenda. It's meant to be. And that means it's all out---right to the finish line.

First, there is crime.

We face one of the nation's highest rates of domestic violence, rape, and child abuse.

Drive-by shootings. Guns in the schools. Crack. Kids killing kids.

People are angry. People are afraid. And people are fed up.

And so tonight, I am announcing a comprehensive and statewide initiative---a five-part plan to combat the growing violence against Alaska's women and children.

We need new troopers to arrest these violent criminals.

New prosecutors to convict them.

New laws to punish them.

Innovative new prison beds to hold them.

And fifth---to break that cycle of violence---new efforts for education, treatment, and prevention.

Tonight we're sending in the cavalry. 23 new troopers. Backed up by new prosecutors to launch six crime units for the State's District Attorneys.

We also must give these troopers the tools they need to do the job.

Our plan calls for changing the rules so rape victims aren't put on trial.

Allowing police to arrest stalkers out on bail who bother their victims again.

Hitting drug dealers in the pocketbook.

Increased punishment for those who sell drugs at schools.

And drug testing for serious car accidents to help protect our kids.

These proposals are designed to work together with the legislation that is pending from last year.

Senator Halford---As you know adult crimes demand adult laws. We must lower the age of majority for murder and rape. Mr. President, the House should pass your conspiracy and juvenile waiver bills NOW!

Speaker Barnes---It's time Alaska works to prevent violence against women and children. Madam Speaker---the Senate should pass your sex offender registration bill NOW!

Yes, our prisons will need new resources. But how we spend will be as important as how much we spend.

Just look to Operation Hope at Point McKenzie. A cost efficient, hard-knocks facility where first offenders are getting a second chance.

My friends, most of last year's crime proposals never made it out of committee. We cannot afford to let that happen again.

The time is late.

The stakes are high.

Our kids are too precious.

We can't send Alaska's police into the streets with one hand tied behind their backs!

Second---but just as important---our kids deserve schools that are second to none.

Not long ago I asked one student if he knew what the three "Rs" were.

"Sure," he said, "Readin'. 'Ritin'. And Remote control."

Education reform has gained momentum in Alaska.

Our goal is simple---to graduate world-class students.

World-class standards are being drafted for English, math, science and all major studies.

And higher standards for the way colleges prepare our teachers will be ready by next spring.

The Alaska 2000 team is doing all it can.

Now, the rest is in the hands of this Legislature.

Education reform is up to you!

This year, I'm asking you to pass the Alaska 2000 legislation.

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Let's lengthen the school year so that the students and the state really get their money's worth.

Let's involve the most powerful education support system ever invented...the parents...

... with charter schools, local advisory school boards, and tenure review committees.

I know that education reform may not be easy, especially for those of you up for re-election.

Those who protect the status quo will probably threaten to campaign against you.

I don't know if my name will be on the ballot, but if it is, my answer will be this...

"If I must choose between our kids' education and my re-election, I'm going with the kids!"

Some of our kids also need a second chance. That's why the Alaska National Guard is starting a new Challenge Program this month.

Up to 120 high school drop-outs this year will learn vocational skills, and they will work toward a high school diplomas during a five-month intensive training program.

Now, a civilization is judged not only by how it cares for its children, but also by how it cares for its elders.

Last week I signed Administrative Order 139 to begin to unify senior services within state government.

Tonight we bring forward a legislative package to fight for Alaska's seniors.

And we are asking you for "an assisted living bill."

As you know, many seniors do not want to live in an institution. They know the obvious---that living at home is often healthier and generally costs less.

So let's make it possible for them to live with family or friends and still get the help they need!

Secondly, we're asking for a clear definition of elder abuse, neglect and financial exploitation.

Through telemarketing and direct mail fraud, a new brand of crooks is promising the world to our seniors and stealing their lifetime savings.

With my plan, you in this room can do something about it.

And now let's take another look at residency requirements in Alaska.

Recently, the court ruled that anyone over 65, with just one year in the state, can qualify to enter our Pioneer Homes.

Over the past decade, a precedent has been set that destroyed the Longevity Bonus program.

It makes our Permanent Fund Dividends a magnet for an invasion from Outside.

And, if we don't do something, it will ruin our Pioneer Homes.

I've heard all the arguments. But I'm not convinced. Alaska is truly unique. The courts must understand this. So we are going to try again.

So I have asked the Department of Law to look once more at a preference system for Alaska's residents that can withstand constitutional challenge.

Our pioneers have always put ALASKA FIRST. I think we ought to do the same for them.

Someone said, "If it were possible to heal the family, it would be possible to heal the world."

So let's ask the question, how can we strengthen Alaska's families?

First of all, we can fight alcohol and drug abuse...

...a crusade with many heroes, including Alaska's young people and someone very special to me.

She has helped so many young people to say no to drugs and alcohol.

Ermalee, much credit belongs to you, and I want to express to you, your husband's pride and Alaska's thanks. (Pause)

Surprised you didn't I?

To help families, we are creating jobs wherever we can.

We have put into place the Family Leave Statute and our emphasis in Health and Social Services is on family preservation.

We are trying to help every Alaskan who wants to live a healthy lifestyle, and will release this month a document, prepared with the help of 500 Alaskans, called "Healthy Alaskans 2000."

We all need to look homeward. To look harder at how we can help our families. To care for each other by "getting fit"---physically, emotionally, spiritually.

As we all know, one of the greatest stresses on families is health care. It costs too much.

There's just no instant cure.

Some of our small businesses fear that reforms for health care may enforce a new system that will break their financial backs.

Tonight I am asking this legislature to set up an Alaska Health Care Commission to start the process of change...

...to provide a mechanism for forming insurance pools...

...to create a universal claims form, to simplify the process and cut costs...

...to help resolve disputes between health care providers and those who pay the bills...

...and to focus the ongoing public debate on comprehensive reform.

Yes, putting ALASKA FIRST means caring both about the cost and quality of Alaska's health care.

Always we are brought back to the issue of cost.

We once again see the direct connection between economic development and compassionate government.

To be successful in our goals, we need revenue. And revenue comes from a healthy economy.

And yet, Outside groups are increasing their efforts to cram a "no growth, no progress" agenda down our throats.

They seem to want an Alaska where no oil is drilled, no trees are harvested, no ore is taken out of from the ground nor fish from the sea...

...no fur is sewn, no ivory is carved by our Native craftsmen.

As a result, our young state is being treated as something less than we were promised.

Something less than an equal partner in this great experiment called freedom.

Something less than a sovereign state endowed with an equal footing to all others.

Well, we Alaskans aren't going to accept "something less."

It's time to let the word go out---that no one dictates to us, and that we will not yield to Outsiders what generations of Alaskans fought to create.

It's time for Alaskans to take our country back.

Congress appears to have forgotten that the final road to statehood began not in Washington...

...but at the furthest reaches of the Alaska mail routes, in villages like Chilkat and Moose Pass.

It was August 26, 1958---a brisk, clear, fall-like day.

And outside 297 polling places, in schools and churches and post offices scattered across four time zones...

...Alaskans lined up to mark the first crude "X's" that grant the consent of the governed.

No bands marched. No fires were lighted, no bells rang out, no soldiers mustered.

But sometime during the night, the awesome nature of Alaska changed for all time.

For the first time in almost 50 years, another star was added to the Nation's flag.

Because on that day, nearly 50,000 Alaskans cast their ballots in the greatest free vote in the history of the territory.

And with that vote, the people of Alaska literally signed a contract.

They didn't just say "yes" to statehood.

They agreed to the terms of statehood.

And that contract, like all contracts, cannot be changed without the consent of both parties and we will walk to the world court on that one.

Congress made a deal not with Alaska's government---but with Alaska's people.

It's time to honor that deal.

And that is why---over the past three years---together we've launched Alaska's second battle for statehood.

The story of Alaska is still being written...

...by this administration and by the men and women in this chamber.

As Republicans, as Democrats, as Independents---we have closed the ranks to truly put ALASKA FIRST.

By launching a barrage of federal lawsuits, we have sent a shot across the bow of those in Washington, D.C. and across the nation---who would pirate both Alaska's pocketbook and Alaska's purpose.

They choose to ignore that Alaska is showing other Arctic countries how to develop resources wisely.

They choose to ignore that Alaska leads the nation in per capita spending on behalf of the environment and natural resources...

...\$520 per person per year---according to the Council of State Governments---more than double that of the next state.

They choose to ignore that while the federal government and most other states wrestle with how to define "sustainable development"...

...Alaska is doing it.

The North Slope is home for the cleanest, most environmentally-responsible industrial project in the world.

With additional exploration and the construction of a natural gas pipeline, we can see a "sustainable future" well into the next century.

That's why we must stand up to Outside interests who would shut down our natural resource revenues.

This is not new in Alaska.

In 1967, I named a 34-year old attorney, the late George Boney, to the Alaska Supreme Court. He became Chief Justice.

I said only one thing to George.

"Don't let them steal Alaska."

He knew what I meant.

I was referring to the mining interests at the turn of the century. And the canned salmon industry prior to statehood.

There has always been absentee interests determined to control and exploit Alaska.

But to the next generation I say, let this be your rule:

Let no special interest own you.

Let no special interest divide you.

In the old days, it was never "them and us." It was ALL of us.

If we stay united we can solve our problems far better here than they can in Washington, D.C.

I do not know if this will be my last opportunity to address you on the state of the state. Or whether this is the beginning of round two.

But I know for sure that this year will be a defining year for Alaska.

As you debate Alaska's most important issues with each other...

...or as you and I---Mr. President and Madam Speaker---face off on difficult choices...

...let's keep one thing foremost in our hearts and minds.

We all love Alaska. Let's put ALASKA FIRST! (Make presentation here)

And so tonight, a journey begins.

We have work to do.

Civilizations are what they think they are.

In much the same way Carl Sandburg saw America, I see Alaska.

I see Alaska not in the setting sun of a black night of despair.

I see Alaska in the crimson light of a rising sun fresh from the burning, creative hand of God.

I see great days ahead for men and women who have the will and vision.

We can win the future and we can hand down to our children and grandchildren an Alaska even better than the one handed to us.

I've never felt more strongly that Alaska's best days lie ahead.

And let us be sure that those who come after us will say of us, that we did everything that could be done.

We finished the race. We kept Alaska strong. We kept the faith and we put ALASKA FIRST.

God bless you and God bless Alaska!