

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 31

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
TWENTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY THE SENATE RULES COMMITTEE

Introduced: 2/16/04

Referred: State Affairs, Resources

A RESOLUTION

1 **Relating to urging the United States Congress to compensate the State of Alaska for the**
2 **effect of federal land ownership on the state's ability to fund public education.**

3 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 **WHEREAS**, for many years, western states, including Alaska, have grappled with the
5 challenge of providing the best education for their citizens; and

6 **WHEREAS** western states face unique challenges in achieving this goal; and

7 **WHEREAS**, from 1979 to 1998, the percentage change in expenditure per pupil in 13
8 western states was 28 percent, compared to 57 percent in the remaining states; and

9 **WHEREAS**, in 2000 - 2001, the pupil per teacher ratio in 13 western states averaged
10 17.9 to one compared with 14.8 to one in the remaining states; and

11 **WHEREAS** the conditions in western states are exacerbated by projections that
12 enrollment will increase by an average of 7.1 percent, compared to an average decrease of 2.6
13 percent in the rest of the nation; and

14 **WHEREAS**, despite the wide disparities in expenditures per pupil and in pupil per
15 teacher ratios, western states tax at a comparable rate and allocate as much of their budgets to
16 public education as the rest of the nation; and

1 **WHEREAS** the ability of western states to fund education is directly related to federal
2 ownership of state land; and

3 **WHEREAS** the federal government owns an average of 51.9 percent of the land in 13
4 western states, compared to 4.1 percent in the remaining states; and

5 **WHEREAS** the enabling acts of most western states promise that five percent of the
6 proceeds from the sale of federal land will go to the states for public education; and

7 **WHEREAS** a federal policy change in 1977 ended these sales, resulting in an
8 estimated \$14,000,000,000 in lost public education funding for western states; and

9 **WHEREAS** the ability of western states to fund public education is further affected
10 by the fact that state and local property taxes, which public education relies heavily upon to
11 fund education, cannot be assessed on federal land; and

12 **WHEREAS** the estimated annual impact of this property tax prohibition on western
13 states is more than \$4,000,000,000; and

14 **WHEREAS** royalties to the western states are reduced because federal land is less
15 likely to be developed and federal laws often place stipulations on the use of state royalty
16 payments; and

17 **WHEREAS** the estimated annual impact of royalty payment policies on western
18 states is more than \$1,860,000,000; and

19 **WHEREAS** much of the land that the federal government transferred to states upon
20 statehood as a trust for public education is difficult to administer and to make productive
21 because it is surrounded by federal land; and

22 **WHEREAS** federal land ownership greatly hinders the ability of western states to
23 fund public education; and

24 **WHEREAS** the federal government should compensate western states for the
25 significant impact federal land ownership has on the ability of western states to educate their
26 citizens; and

27 **WHEREAS** just compensation will allow western states to be on equal footing with
28 the rest of the nation in their efforts to provide education for their citizens;

29 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
30 Congress to appropriate just compensation to the State of Alaska for the effect of federal land
31 ownership on the state's ability to fund public education.

1 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Ted Stevens and the
2 Honorable Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S.
3 Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.