

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 3, 2014

8:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bob Lynn, Chair
Representative Wes Keller, Vice Chair
Representative Lynn Gattis
Representative Shelley Hughes
Representative Doug Isaacson
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Charisse Millett

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 17

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the purchase of Alaska for \$7,200,000; urging Alaska communities to plan activities and events in 2017 to commemorate the Alaska Purchase; requesting that the Alaska Historical Commission coordinate events; and inviting Alaska communities, schools, universities, libraries, museums, businesses, civic and historical groups, and government agencies to participate in and support commemorative activities and events.

- MOVED SCR 17 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SCR 17

SHORT TITLE: 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF ALASKA PURCHASE

SPONSOR(S): RULES

02/26/14	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/26/14	(S)	STA
03/18/14	(S)	STA RPT 3DP
03/18/14	(S)	DP: GIESSEL, WIELECHOWSKI, COGILL
03/18/14	(S)	STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/18/14	(S)	Moved SCR 17 Out of Committee
03/18/14	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/21/14	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
03/21/14	(S)	VERSION: SCR 17

03/24/14 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/14 (H) STA
04/03/14 (H) STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

ERIN HANSON, Staff
Senator Lesil McGuire
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SCR 17 on behalf of the Senate Rules Standing Committee, sponsor, on which Senator McGuire is chair.

BARBARA PROPES, Chief of Staff
Office of the Lieutenant Governor
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on SCR 17.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:06:25 AM](#)

CHAIR BOB LYNN called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Keller, Isaacson, Gattis, Hughes, Kreiss-Tomkins, and Lynn were present at the call to order.

SCR 17-150TH ANNIVERSARY OF ALASKA PURCHASE

[8:06:28 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN announced that the only order of business was SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 17, Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the purchase of Alaska for \$7,200,000; urging Alaska communities to plan activities and events in 2017 to commemorate the Alaska Purchase; requesting that the Alaska Historical Commission coordinate events; and inviting Alaska communities, schools, universities, libraries, museums, businesses, civic and historical groups, and government agencies to participate in and support commemorative activities and events.

[8:06:54 AM](#)

ERIN HANSON, Staff, Senator Lesil McGuire, Alaska State Legislature, presented SCR 17 on behalf of the Senate Rules

Standing Committee, sponsor, on which Senator McGuire is chair. She stated that the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the United States' purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 is an ideal opportunity for Alaskans to celebrate the state's history. She said the proposed legislation recognizes the historic significance of the anniversary of the purchase and encourages all Alaskan communities to plan events to celebrate the anniversary. Further, it asks the Alaska Historical Commission (ANC) to "lead in planning these events" and "seek opportunities to engage support and coordinate events through our communities, schools, universities, libraries, museums, businesses, civic and historical groups, and government agencies." She said passing SCR 17 now would provide communities with ample time to plan such events.

[8:08:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON noted that the sponsor statement reflects that Alaska was purchased for \$7.2 million.

CHAIR LYNN asked if anyone knew how much that would be in today's dollars.

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON said, "A lot of money."

CHAIR LYNN remarked, "But still a bargain."

[8:09:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON relayed that he was born 90 years from the day of the Alaska purchase, and he traveled to Alaska as a Russian interpreter. He asked what the sponsor envisioned in terms of celebrations throughout the state.

[8:10:02 AM](#)

MS. HANSON replied that currently, Sitka holds a big parade and a ball on Alaska Day. She said she thinks the day would provide a good opportunity for "parades and events and fairs and things like that." She said more than anything, there would be an educational opportunity for libraries to put together events, schools to take an extra step in speaking about Alaska history, and museums to put together exhibits.

[8:11:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS reminisced about attending celebrations in Anchorage with her family in 1967, when she was a child living in the Interior. She likened the events as being similar to today's Fur Rendezvous.

[8:13:04 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN remarked that the state observes Seward's Day. He opined, "It's a shame ... there's not some kind of coordination between the two. It cannot happen, I understand, because it's two totally different dates. But he purchased it."

[8:13:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON indicated that a place for celebration was created in Fairbanks, originally called [Alaska 67 Centennial Exposition], then Alaskaland, then Pioneer Park. He suggested that other communities could create monuments, such as parks, that would enable communities to gather and celebrate on a regular basis life in Alaska, while remembering Alaska's pioneers.

CHAIR LYNN suggested a commemorative coin could be made.

[8:14:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES opined that two cents an acre was a good deal. She related having seen a map of the Lower 48 with an overlay of a map of Alaska, with a comment that in 1867, at the time of acquisition, the purchase of Alaska was called, "Seward's Folly." She said the map was provided by "Travel Juneau," which called [the purchase of Alaska] "the best deal ever." She expressed appreciation to the bill sponsor. She related her understanding that there have been national discussions about whether it was a good deal, and she opined that it is up to Alaska to let the rest of the nation know that, indeed, it was.

[8:15:53 AM](#)

BARBARA PROPES, Chief of Staff, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, testified that under statute, the lieutenant governor serves on the Alaska Historical Commission, and she is his staff designee. She said she has been working on event planning for the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary for almost two years. She relayed that during the centennial year, there were 46 projects, and the federal government gave money because "Alaska

had no economic base" and was trying to create one. She explained, "That was before oil." Currently there are capital projects, many of which will be "timed around this." She said she has coordinated with the Seward House, in Auburn, New York - a museum where William Seward once lived - to have original artifacts sent, including the original of the painting on the wall of the committee room. She said the goal was to have an exhibit at the opening of the State Library Archives Museum (SLAM) [currently under construction], as well as a traveling exhibit to museums that have the right staff and are temperature controlled. The celebration would last a year, and Seward's Day would be a part of it. The exhibit would end up in Sitka, which would host the main celebration. Ms. Propes said the Lieutenant Governor's office has also reached out to the City of Seattle, because "Washington state would not be developed without this." She noted there is a William H. Seward park in Seattle. She said the office is also reaching out to the Native communities, acknowledging that "that's an important part of the discussion." She encouraged discussion around the state. She said the office is working on a statute of Seward that would be erected near the Dimond Court House.

[8:18:21 AM](#)

MS. PROPES, in response to Chair Lynn, offered her understanding that currently the only bust of Seward exists in Anchorage. She said the Office of the Lieutenant Governor has been working with the Seward Family to have them attend events. She said people in Sitka are considering a coffee table book. She said there was a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that was part of the museum project, so there would be books and mementos for the archives. She relayed she has worked with people in Haines and Seward, and she said there would be events statewide. Ms. Propes said there will be academic discussion, as well as celebration; therefore, it will be a commemoration. She said the office is looking at the possibility of having a coin, which would help to raise money for the events. She indicated that fundraising is another reason why it is important to begin the process soon, because it can take a couple of years. She said the planning list is long, but there is hope that a lot of national attention will be drawn, in order to have a discussion about Alaska and its worth.

MS. PROPES indicated that originally [the worth of Alaska] was described as "a sucked orange" in some newspaper articles. She echoed Seward's Folly was another term related to the purchase of Alaska. She talked about reaching out to work with the

Canadians, and she noted that when Senator Dennis Eagan had headed the centennial commission, one of the questions he had asked was what it would have been like if Alaska had never become part of the U.S. She said the Office of the Lieutenant Governor wants to challenge people to have the discussion as well. Ms. Propes emphasized the importance of having [the proposed joint resolution] in hand when approaching the federal government, not only as authorization, but to show the support of the state.

8:20:30 AM

CHAIR LYNN ventured that the border between Canada and Alaska must follow a longitude line, and he asked if the current border is the original one.

MS. PROPES offered her understanding that it is the original border, but proffered that its designation had more to do with fur trade.

CHAIR LYNN asked where most of the Seward family is located today.

MS. PROPES answered Auburn, New York. In response to a question, she confirmed that there are a quite a few descendants still in Auburn.

8:21:48 AM

CHAIR LYNN said the Russian Orthodox Church is a more integral part of the state's history than any other church, and he asked if the church would be part of the celebration.

MS. PROPES said right now the emphasis is on getting communities "to drive what's going to happen in their particular areas." Notwithstanding that, she mentioned a person named, Anna, who is the "bell ringer" in Sitka who would like to see some restoration of the Russian Orthodox churches; however, "most federal grants won't allow you to spend money on that." She said the Alaska Historical Commission has "sort of moved some of the grants that we have to address anniversaries, and that would allow some funding to help with churches, because churches would be allowed to be part of this."

CHAIR LYNN recommended Ms. Propes contact the hierarchy of the Russia Orthodox Church to inquire about its plans, because "it very much affects them."

MS. PROPES responded that the intention is to reach out to the church after establishing the authority [through the passage of SCR 17].

[8:23:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON recommended that Ms. Propes contact the State Department, which he said has given money overseas for the restoration of mosques. He opined, "So, if the State Department can do that overseas on religious buildings, certainly we can do that in recognition of our own people here." He asked for details related to the large painting on the wall of the House State Affairs Standing Committee room, to which Ms. Propes had previously referred.

[8:24:47 AM](#)

MS. PROPES said the painting depicts "the original signing." She continued:

It was quite an ordeal getting Congress to pass it, and then they didn't pay for it, which was on Seward's Day ... when it passed. ... They finally signed in the middle of the night, because I think that he was nervous when they finally had the agreement. And so, this symbolizes the actual signing of the document that transferred.

[8:25:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON indicated he had just been informed that there was information about the painting just below it on the wall.

[8:26:05 AM](#)

MS. PROPES, in response to Chair Lynn, reiterated that this painting in the room was a copy of the original, which the board had arranged to borrow for [2017].

[8:26:42 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[8:26:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER moved to report SCR 17 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal note. There being no objection, SCR 17 moved out of the House State Affairs Standing Committee.

[8:27:21 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:27 a.m.